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TENNYSON ON KNOWLEDGE, EVIL AND HISTORY

by



JOHN STANLEY NORTH

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
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recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance,  
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TENNYSON ON KNOWLEDGE, EVIL AND HISTORY

submitted by

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## ABSTRACT

### TENNYSON ON KNOWLEDGE, EVIL AND HISTORY

Several Tennyson scholars have suggested that epistemology is a basic issue of his poetry. This thesis begins with an analysis of the poet's theory of knowledge and of his distinction between knowledge and wisdom. It outlines similarities between his ideas and those of three major influences upon English thought: the Cambridge Platonists, Immanuel Kant and S.T. Coleridge. Each of these was interested in the conflict between science and theology, and in the relevance of epistemology to this conflict. Evidence indicates that Tennyson knew the works of each in detail. Many of his poetic assertions now popularly dismissed as signs of intellectual incompetence echo their conclusions.

His epistemological position led him to the belief that man has an innate moral sensibility, and that evil springs from within the human heart. Chapter Two shows how he explains the persistence of evil by accepting a view of human freedom midway between that of the determinists--that man has no free will--and that of the voluntarists--that man is wholly free. He believes that man often chooses evil rather than good, cannot always accomplish the good he wills, and sometimes cannot distinguish between good and evil. Whatever the cause of evil, the result upon the individual is inevitable: isolation, loss of freedom and weakening of the will. The only antidote is love expressed through concrete moral





actions. This emphasis upon love explains his frequent references to the Incarnation.

Tennyson's view of history is related to his belief that evil arises out of the individual and to his belief in personal immortality. Chapter Three discusses these limiting factors, then comments upon his faith in progress, his supposed optimism--or pessimism--and his distinction between the "secular to-be" and the "one far-off divine event."

The final chapter uses the conclusions of the previous three as a basis for an explication of Idylls of the King. First, two major techniques are explained: the use of mythic subject matter and of a discontinuous narrative method. Then their relationship to the theme "Sense at war with Soul" is explored. Reference is made to the poet's use of the courtly love tradition and of "flat" or "type" characterization as means of developing the theme. In the microcosm of Camelot can be seen the operation of Tennyson's major ideas. As the knights commit themselves to the vows of knighthood, to Arthur and to one sole Queen of Beauty and of love they find themselves able to distinguish between reality and illusion, to find wisdom beyond knowledge, to gather a mysterious strength which enables them to overcome evil within themselves and the world. Like Sir Gareth they gain an optimism which sees beyond the gloom of Time and the Last Battle, and finds death to be only a blooming boy.



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# I

## EPISTEMOLOGY

Speculative philosophy, which to the superficial appears a thing so remote from the business of life and the outward interests of men, is in reality the thing on earth which most influences them, and in the long run overbears every other influence save those which it must in itself obey.

The groundwork of all philosophy must be laid in the philosophy of the mind.

John Stuart Mill<sup>1</sup>

The great questions which Tennyson raises in In Memoriam --can beauty and finitude be reconciled in other than a cynical, temporal vision? is morality wholly relative, nothing more than cultural idiosyncrasy? can human love be meaningful in the face of death?--may be summed up in one. That is, how can we know whether reality exists beyond the phenomenal? The question appears in poems written before Tennyson knew Hallam, and is asked in one form or another in most of the poet's later work. His ideas on the nature of evil and the direction of history are related to this problem. In fact several critics say that the question of epistemology is the major issue in his poetry.<sup>2</sup>

The answers offered in In Memoriam have been called glib, the easy solutions of an undisciplined mind.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, if considered apart from their intellectual background they seem only emotional assertions. For instance, when faced with the decay of beauty, he says: "I see in part/ That all, as in some piece of art,/ Is toil coöperant to an end" (195:CXXVII).<sup>4</sup> When the traditional proofs of the existence of God collapse he responds



to the challenge "believe no more" with the statement "I have felt" as a basis for faith (194:CXXIV). Bereaved of his closest friend, he insists that Hallam lives on after physical death as a self-conscious, creative being (174:XLVII; 181:LXXXII). But in spite of this seeming irresponsibility, a good deal of evidence indicates that Tennyson arrived at his convictions after reading the philosophical and religious writings of eminent western thinkers, and that he based his ideas on a prominent intellectual tradition.<sup>5</sup>

The extent of his concern with epistemology can be seen by an analysis of the tensions in various poems. "The Miller's Daughter," one of the most successful in the 1832 volume,<sup>6</sup> presents a situation antithetical to that of In Memoriam. The questions of the elegy rise out of tragedy, while the questions of the earlier poem rise in the midst of an idyllic situation, yet both sets of questions are the same. The miller's son-in-law sits reminiscing of his courtship and marriage. He runs through all his reasons for contentment, then asks himself:

Have I not found a happy earth?  
 I least should breathe a thought of pain.  
 Would God renew me from my birth,  
 I'd almost live my life again. (35:25-28)

Yet through his nostalgia runs a disturbing awareness:

Yet fill my glass; give me one kiss:  
 My own sweet Alice, we must die.  
 There's somewhat in this world amiss  
 Shall be unriddled by and by.  
 There's somewhat flows to us in life,  
 But more is taken quite away. (35:17-22)

He can find no answer to his quest for a level of meaning which runs below the trivial joys of life. Although grateful for the







love he has known he remains "half-anger'd with [his] happy lot."

The poem concludes with an image of sterility:

On the chalk-hill the bearded grass  
Is dry and dewless. Let us go. (38:245-246)

The well-known song from The Princess, "Tears, Idle Tears," expresses the same malaise. It is sung by one of Ida's maids just after Ida has given an enraptured explanation of the glories of her college, and begins: "Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,/ *Tears* from the depth of some divine despair" (134:21-22). The despair is caused by the deep unfulfilled desires of human experience, by the sense that beneath all the simple delights and pursuits of life is a level of reality undiscerned and probably tragic. The song culminates with the lament: "O Death in Life."

The uneasiness to which these poems give expression has occasioned much comment by critics such as Nicolson, Baum, Carr, and Ryals.<sup>7</sup> G. Robert Stange has remarked in his study of the theme of isolation in Tennyson's poetry that everywhere occurs a "sense of solitude and death. . . in what should be the midst of life."<sup>8</sup> Stange says that such images as the voiceless hall in "The Outcast," empty courts in "Tithonus," sunless halls in "Demeter and Persephone" and empty streets in In Memoriam indicate the poet's awareness that all is not right in his world. The gloominess is often attributed to childhood influences and to an inherited "blackbloodedness."<sup>9</sup> But whatever the cause of the prevailing tone, it finds its expression in extraordinary sensitivity to pain and death, and in a questioning of the meaning of life.



The dramatic monologues vent his uneasiness by challenging the validity of accepted moral absolutes. Ina Beth Sessions and Robert Langbaum agree in their theoretical studies of the dramatic monologue that the form is "an historicizing and a psychologizing of judgment."<sup>10</sup> In other words, the poem surveys judgments made by individuals and in turn makes and forces the reader to make judgments upon the speaker. The process necessarily involves an assessment of the grounds of judgment. An example of this process appears in Browning's The Ring and the Book. There the poet records many different judgments upon one particular act. At the conclusion of each judgment, each "monologue," he demands of the reader: "But what say you?" Tennyson, like Browning, first arouses sympathy in the reader for particular judgments, then exposes weaknesses in the position for which sympathy has been aroused. The result is that the reader questions the basis of his own moral position.

The speaker of "Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind" (1830) confesses himself to be in a dilemma. He wishes to regain the carefree religious faith of his youth. But he cannot, because he also wishes to question and prove the truths he once accepted. He wishes to

lock into the laws  
Of life and death, and things that seem,  
And things that be, and analyze  
Our double nature, and compare  
All creeds till [he has] found the one,  
If one there be. (6:172-177)

When the reader begins to assess the validity of each side of the argument he is confronted with the title of the poem. If the confession is supposed, what is the speaker's true moral



position? And why is the sensitive mind second-rate? The implication is that the dilemma is false. The reader is forced to find his own grounds for judging the speaker.

"Oenone" is another dramatic monologue in which specific moral truths are challenged. The nymph laments that Paris, her lover, has left her for Aphrodite, and that as a result not only she, Oenone, but the whole of Troy is engulfed in flames and destroyed. This change has come about because Paris has been forced to judge the fairest of three goddesses: Hera, goddess of power; Pallas, goddess of wisdom; and Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty. But when "gazing on divinity disrobed/ . . . mortal eyes are frail to judge of fair." Therefore Paris must choose between the bribes which each goddess, according to her nature, offers. Although Pallas argues that law and right are the highest and best reality, simply because "right is right," he chooses Aphrodite. It is difficult not to sympathize with Oenone and Troy, but on what grounds could Hera or Pallas be said to offer better alternatives? It is significant that in Homer Pallas offered military victory rather than wisdom. By emphasizing the aspect of the myth which treats her as goddess of wisdom, Tennyson focusses attention on morality: upon what grounds can man, "frail to judge of fair," make those moral decisions he is faced with?

In many other dramatic monologues particular moral absolutes are questioned. "Ulysses," "The Lotus Eaters," "Tithonus" and the Locksley Hall poems are examples. In some, such as "St. Simeon Stylites," "St. Agnes' Eve," "Sir Galahad" and "The May Queen," religious absolutes are challenged. But in each case the technique





is the same: the reader is forced to question the basis for assuming that any particular spiritual value is meaningful.

The area in which Tennyson's epistemological interests are perhaps most obvious, and the one which has received most critical comment, is that of conflict between the scientific spirit and religious tradition.<sup>11</sup> He was quick to recognize the implications of what Freud has called the second or Darwinian Narcissistic hurt of man: that man is not the crown of creation but only one brief stage in the evolutionary process. The anthropological extensions of Darwinian theory made by Max Muller and the sociological conclusions of Herbert Spencer, quite apart from the biological theories of Darwin and his immediate predecessors in Britain and on the Continent, gave a serious setback to orthodox ideas of the sanctity of individual lives, of the control of natural processes by a charitable personal God, and of the eternal nature of such ideals as goodness, justice and love. If human life is evolving, the idea of immortality quickly becomes ridiculous. What is the value of having an immortal but inferior existence? The only possible response was to take a very close second look at the logical construct of such ideas.

Three influences played a significant role in the development of Tennyson's convictions: the Cambridge Platonists, Immanuel Kant and S. T. Coleridge. All were primarily interested in developing an epistemological position which could offer an acceptable alternative to the claim of empiricism that reality





exists only in the realm of the senses, and to the claim of rationalism that reality exists only in the world of mind. Considerable evidence exists that Tennyson was familiar with each of the three, and that he adopted the basic tenets of each. Therefore a brief outline of their positions will be of value.

The Cambridge Platonists were a group of five seventeenth-century philosophical divines, resident teachers at the university. The most important works of each are: Benjamin Whichcote (1609-83), Moral and Religious Aphorisms; Henry More (1614-87), Enchiridion Ethicum; John Smith (1616-52), Of the True Way or Method of Attaining to Divine Knowledge; Ralph Cudworth (1617-85), The True Intellectual System of the Universe; and Nathaniel Culverwell (1618-51), An Elegant and Learned Discourse of the Light of Nature. The group found its impetus in a reaction against certain extremes in both the scientific and religious spirits of the day.<sup>12</sup> Although not opposed to the scientific spirit of the Enlightenment on the whole (at least two members of the group, Cudworth and More, were members of the Royal Society), they feared the tendency toward a mechanistic view of man and nature, believing this view to be both ethically and religiously unsound. They were particularly uneasy with Bacon's attempts to separate matters of science and faith, for they felt that the immediate benefits of reducing the superstition limiting scientific progress would be overshadowed by the results of the implication that ethics and religion were fields in which rational and experiential norms did not prevail. On the other



hand, they opposed the narrowness of Puritan theology because of its limitation of true religion to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, or worse, to particular interpretations of a few Biblical texts. Such a view of religion, they felt, did not give sufficient credit to that element of the divine in man which enables him to perceive spiritual truths without the benefit of particular revelations. The dogmatism common to both Empiricism and Puritanism was steadfastly opposed by the Cambridge group, who as a result found themselves caught between the two camps.

The one weapon which they used most effectively against both groups was the Platonic concept of apriority.<sup>13</sup> Cudworth accused the empiricists of beginning with an analysis of sense perception rather than with an analysis of judgment. Against "the Democritick and Epicurean Atheists" who "have never rightly understood the atomic physiology" he argues that:

Sense indeed is Phantastical and Relative to the Sentient;  
But . . . there is a Higher Faculty, of Understanding and Reason  
in us, which thus discovers the Phantastical of Sense, and reaches  
to the Absoluteness of Truth; or is the Criterion thereof.<sup>14</sup>

Knowledge is not sensation alone, but the result of man's judgment upon material supplied by the senses. Therefore the reliability of knowledge is dependent upon the state of man's various mental powers. Similarly, against the narrow credal assertions of Puritans and Established Church alike the Cambridge men asserted the thesis of natural reason and natural religion: there is a "living principle of Holiness within us" which enables man to attain a knowledge of divinity quite apart from any theological system or statement of belief.<sup>15</sup>



Upon this central motif of natural religion and natural reason they based their argument that experience is not limited to empirical or even rational modes of perception, but includes the spiritual, which is to say the ethical and religious. In other words, reality exists beyond the phenomenal. Here is the specifically Platonic aspect of their doctrine. There is no need of a special mystical cognitive organ by which we may commune with the supersensible. The ascent to the divine is accomplished rather by our own spiritual power and the Logos that dwells within the soul. Man has an intuitive knowledge of and can participate in the great Archetypal Ideas.<sup>16</sup>

Because natural reason involves the heart and the will, it is very much a subjective judgment of truth. "He is the best Christian, whose heart beats with the truest pulse towards heaven; not he whose head spineth out the finest cobwebs."<sup>17</sup> This subjectivity extends to all the intellectual processes, for all are dependent upon a moral state. "Nothing is the true improvement of our rational faculties," says Whichcote, "but the several virtues of sobriety, modesty, gentleness, humility, obedience to God and charity to men."<sup>18</sup>

Consequently, the crux of faith lies in religious and moral conviction rather than in logical demonstration. Man knows there is a God because of his yearning for the Summum Bonum, and this knowledge is reinforced by his experience, argued Smith in his True Method of Knowing.<sup>19</sup> There can be no apriori demonstrations





of God, "neither can God be apprehended by any demonstrative science."<sup>20</sup>

Although the super-rational may form a large part of religious experience, the anti-rational never does. Two of Whichcote's favourite statements were: "I oppose not rational to spiritual; for spiritual is most rational," and "Reason is the candle of the Lord."<sup>21</sup> Again, he would say: "To go against Reason is to go against God."<sup>22</sup>

On the principle that apprehension of truth is a subjective matter, the Cambridge men felt religious toleration to be essential, not so much for the sake of peace as in order better to grasp the whole truth by coming at it from many angles. They did not confuse toleration with indifference as they were accused of, for they did not accept positions they felt inherently irrational.<sup>23</sup>

The idea of immortality, like the idea of God and of the freedom of the will, they thought essential to the moral life. Without these, says More, "there is no religion, no Piety nor impiety, no Vertue nor Vice, Justice or Injustice, but what it pleases him who has the longest Sword to call so."<sup>24</sup>

Ernst Cassirer comments that although the Cambridge Movement has received comparatively little attention in the histories of English philosophy and religion,<sup>25</sup> it in fact made an intellectual contribution which affected the very conception and structure of the modern mind.

It is an important stage on the way leading from Luther to Kant, from the concept of freedom of the Reformation to the concept of freedom of idealism, from the principle of justification by faith to the principle of the autonomy of the will and of the practical reason.<sup>26</sup>





Tennyson's first contact with the Cambridge Platonists was through his father. Dr. George Clayton Tennyson, himself educated at Cambridge, had an impressive library of more than thirteen hundred volumes, covering history, metaphysics, religion, science and the classics. In his library were Cudworth's Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality, Gilbert Burnet's The History of my Own Time (1724) and various books of Edward Stillingfleet (1635-1699) and John Tillotson (1630-1694).<sup>27</sup> The last three were eminent Cambridge men and disciples of the seventeenth-century movement of which Burnet's book was the standard history. When Alfred arrived at Trinity he was favoured by William Whewell, a tutor and later master of the college. Whewell, another follower of the movement, wrote a preface summarizing a dissertation by James Macintosh on "The Progress of Ethical Philosophy." Both the dissertation and the preface were submitted to the eighth edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1829. Macintosh treated the major figures of the Cambridge Platonist group extensively and traced their influence down to the nineteenth century. It is unlikely that Whewell, professor of moral philosophy, would let Tennyson off without a thorough familiarity with Macintosh's work and its sources. That the poet thought enough of his early teacher to purchase his three-volume History of the Inductive Sciences when it was published seven years later indicates his respect for Whewell's work. Arthur Hallam also knew of the Macintosh dissertation, and spoke of it as "the most important



contribution . . . which, for many years, has enlarged the inductive philosophy of the mind."<sup>28</sup> Hallam and the Apostles have been spoken of as "that gallant band of Platonico-Wordsworthian-Coleridgean-anti-Utilitarians."<sup>29</sup> They spent much time arguing the merits of epistemological writers such as Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Butler, Hume, Bentham, Descartes and Kant. Alfred and Hallam together went through Burnet's History and Bishop Butler's Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature (1736), which Macintosh shows to be in direct line with the thought of the Cambridge men.<sup>30</sup> Alfred knew Holy Living and Holy Dying (1750-51), written by Jeremy Taylor, who was also a disciple of the movement, and particularly of Henry More. From every side Tennyson received the influence of this school of English thought--from his father, his circle of friends, his closest companion and his teachers.

A second major influence upon Tennyson in his search for a means of distinguishing appearance from reality and of establishing valid moral and religious principles was Immanuel Kant. In the Critique of Pure Reason (1781) and the Critique of Practical Reason (1788) Kant was attempting the same task as John Smith in The True Way of Knowing and Ralph Cudworth in The True Intellectual System. Each explored the strengths and limitations of various ways of attaining knowledge, each was aware of the weaknesses of Empiricism and Continental Rationalism, each was interested in establishing a "way of knowing" which could encompass moral and religious experience.

Kant was disturbed with what he considered to be the corrosive effect of Hume's scepticism upon the insights of Newtonian science,



on the one hand, and upon religion and ethics on the other. His first Critique was concerned with asserting the validity of empirical and rational modes of perception as much as with stating their limits. In a statement obviously aimed at Hume's claim that books of religion or metaphysics which contain no "abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number," and "no experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact or existence . . . can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion,"<sup>31</sup> Kant said:

This critique is . . . opposed only to dogmatism, that is to the presumption that it is possible to make progress with pure knowledge, according to principles, from concepts alone (those that are philosophical) . . . . Dogmatism is thus the dogmatic procedure of pure reason, without previous criticism of its own powers.<sup>32</sup>

Here, a hundred years after Whichcote and Cudworth, the issue of apriority is used once again to defend the validity of moral propositions. This was the method he used to indicate the limitations of those who said on one hand that the only certainty is that of the senses, and those who said on the other that the only certainty was that of the reason. In what has been called the most important single sentence of The Critique of Pure Reason Kant said: "Concepts without percepts are empty; percepts without concepts are blind."<sup>33</sup> Knowledge depends upon reason and sense in combination and is the product of rational interpretation of primary sense experience.

Some of the most significant conclusions at which Kant arrived on the basis of his own criticism of the powers of the Pure Reason, conclusions which have echoes in Tennyson's work, follow from this statement.





Time and space he found to be radical limitations upon the empirical and rational modes of perception. As we can only sense and reason in terms of time and space, that which is beyond them is beyond our powers of knowing. Conclusions about such intangibles as moral or religious truth can never be labelled knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

He then proceeded to explore non-phenomenal reality, arguing: Hitherto it has been assumed that all our knowledge must conform to objects. But all attempts to extend our knowledge of objects by establishing something in regard to them *apriori*, by means of concepts, fails . . . . We must therefore . . . suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge . . . . We should than be proceeding precisely on the lines of Copernicus' primary hypothesis.<sup>35</sup>

That is, contrary to the method of Hume, we must assume the existence of a particular non-phenomenal reality and then explore the gestalt involved, consisting of Knower, Known, and Act of Knowing.

Kant went on to postulate a "faculty psychology." Man, he believed, has an innate moral capacity, his Practical Reason, "the sole objects of which are those of the good and the evil."<sup>36</sup> He is prompted by a "categorical imperative" within his nature to do moral acts, to strive for good and reject evil. Certainty of the reality of moral law is provided by the emotion which that law arouses in man (a certainty much like the conviction of the Cambridge Platonists):

In the boundless esteem for the pure moral law, removed from all practical advantage, as practical reason presents it to us . . . there is something so singular that we cannot but wonder at finding this influence of a merely intellectual idea or feeling to be inexplicable to speculative reason, and at having to be satisfied with being able to see *apriori* that such a feeling is inseparably bound with the idea of the moral law in every finite rational being.<sup>37</sup>

This concept of morality necessarily implies freedom of the





will. Kant proceeds to argue:

The autonomy of the will is the sole principle of all moral laws and of the duties conforming to them . . . . By a concept of practical reason I understand the idea of an object as an effect possible through freedom.<sup>38</sup>

Man is free to respond to "a radical innate evil" in human nature which expresses itself as a defiance of the moral law in favour of self-love and the inclination to acquire worth in the opinion of others (which is to say, jealousy and rivalry).<sup>39</sup> Man is a battleground between duty and inclination, noumenal and phenomenal, or in Tennyson's words, between soul and sense.

The sense of duty alone is able to provide man with the power to overcome the evil principle within. As the idea of original sin is false, and as:

man is in the perilous state (of exposure to the evil principle), through his own fault; hence he is bound at the very least to strive with all his might to extricate himself from it . . . . How can he possibly bring about this revolution by his own powers and of himself become a good man? Yet duty bids us do this, and duty demands nothing of us which we cannot do.<sup>40</sup>

In his insistence on total freedom Kant's demands that man rise above evil often rise to a harsh scream. In the final chapters of Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone he warns that the progress of the race is dependent upon the achievement of a moral State.

The moral law implies the existence of a personal God and of immortality. The conception of a moral law requires the possibility of its attainment and of a state of happiness proportional to that morality. As man is finite, neither is possible in this world, so immortal or infinite existence is necessary.



Similarly, it is necessary to postulate the existence of God as the only cause adequate to the effect of ultimate happiness proportional to the achievement of the moral law.<sup>41</sup>

Tennyson encountered Kant through Coleridge, Whewell and Hare, his tutor. Coleridge was one of the first to introduce Kant to England, and certainly relied heavily on him for some of his own theories. Whewell knew Kant by virtue of his professorship in moral philosophy. Hare, together with Thirlwall, was intrigued with German thought and produced the first English translation of Schleiermacher. Pfleiderer remarks that "next to Coleridge, whose way of thinking on philosophy he adopted, Julius Hare was above all his English contemporaries the student best acquainted with German theological science."<sup>42</sup> Kant was one of the philosophers who occupied the attention of the Apostles. Tennyson once remarked that he knew other philosophers "obiter and obscurely," but that he had some notion of Kant.<sup>43</sup> Yet the extensiveness of his knowledge of major philosophical works has been documented by many of his contemporaries.

The third major influence on Tennyson was Coleridge. Coleridge himself looked upon Kant and the Cambridge men as his teachers. In Aids to Reflection (1824) he quotes directly from Henry More for many of the Aphorisms which form the basis of the work. According to Julius Hare, in 1829 Coleridge was being received by many as the most outstanding English mind.<sup>44</sup> Whether or not Hare was overstating the case, the Apostles agreed with



him. Eleanor Mattes writes that Coleridge was their guiding spirit.<sup>45</sup> Therefore Tennyson may be expected to have known much of Coleridge, both by virtue of his membership in the Apostles, and through Hallam, one of the group's leading lights.

In the opening pages of The Friend (1808) Coleridge speaks of the importance of establishing a sound epistemological position before proceeding to study the nature of truth.<sup>46</sup> He is obviously sharpening up the old apriori tool of his predecessors, for The Friend is an argument for traditional spiritual "truths" and against Empiricist and Rationalist claims that knowledge of such truths is tenuous at best. He follows a logical process much like that of Kant. Truths of the spirit are not discernible, he says, by the intellect alone:

The evidence of the doctrines of religion could not, like the truths of abstract science, be wholly independent of the will. If the mere intellect could make no certain discovery of a holy and intelligent first cause, it might yet supply a demonstration that no legitimate argument could be drawn from the intellect against its truth.<sup>47</sup>

However, apart from the intellect man has another faculty, the Reason, which enables him to perceive noumenal truths. He describes Reason as the divine in man, as "part of the Image of God in us," and speaks of Christ as "Essential Reason."<sup>48</sup>

It is the office, and, as it were, the instinct of Reason to bring a unity into all our conception . . . . Now this is possible on the assumption or hypothesis of a ONE as the ground and cause of the Universe, and which . . . is the subject, neither of Time nor Change . . . . Well! the Idea, which is the basis of Religion, commanded by the Conscience and required by Morality . . . presents itself to our mind with additional attributes . . .





of Holiness, Providence, Love, Justice and Mercy. I comprehend, moreover, the independent (extra-mundane) existence and personality of the supreme ONE, as our Creator, Lord and Judge.<sup>49</sup>

In extending the province of Reason to religious sensibility he goes a step beyond Kant, and takes the same position as the Cambridge Platonists.

Two tests together provide sufficient grounds for assuming the reality of spiritual truths:

In subjects not under the cognizance of the senses wise men have always attached a high value to general and long-continued assent, as a presumption of truth.

He quotes Plato and Cicero as examples, then lists the second test: "There are spiritual truths which must derive their evidence from within."<sup>50</sup> These are no more than the grounds used by Kant-- that the moral sense is universal and that it evokes a strong emotion in the individual.

Coleridge's concept of evil is also similar to that of Kant: "[There is] a Law in the Nature of Man resisting the Law of God." This is a fact acknowledged by all religions and expressed in the myths of Prometheus and of Cupid and Psyche.<sup>51</sup> The opposition to "the Law of God" is expressed as an assertion of egoistic self-concern, and is often unrecognized by man as opposition. An example is the Ancient Mariner's unawareness of the moral implications of his murder of the albatross.

Coleridge makes an important departure from Kant in asserting that the opposition between sense and soul cannot be overcome by the unaided human will. The will must be assisted





by divine grace, expressed first in an awakening of the soul to the fact of responsibility, and then through the extension of divine love, as expressed in the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation. The function of grace is evident in "The Ancient Mariner," where the hero is awakened to a sin committed unconsciously, is "chosen" by a phantom woman, "Death-in-Life," and is forgiven after his prayers have failed when he is shown the beauty of watersnakes and blesses them "unaware."

One of the most notable characteristics shared by these three major influences which Tennyson encountered, apart from similar points of doctrine, is their response to the various fields of human inquiry. All were eager to accept the most positive contributions of each field, but balked when they met attitudes which they felt led to limitation or stagnation. Moreover, each saw or thought they saw evidence that beneath the variety and seeming contradictions of life lay the possibility of a unity of meaning and purpose, harmony rather than discord. Finally, all stressed the individual's acceptance of and judgment upon truth as an integral part of that truth.

By the middle of the nineteenth century the point made by Hume in his Treatise of Human Nature (1740) had been effectively carried. The only truths which can be proven logically necessary are those of formal propositions. When Tennyson gave a negative vote to the question of the Apostles: "Is an intelligible First Cause deducible from the Phenomenon of the Universe?" or



when he looked into a microscope and said: "Strange that these wonders should draw some men to God and repel others. No more reason in one than in the other," he was only making a statement upon which leading figures of all disciplines and of the most various persuasions agreed.<sup>52</sup>

In the opening pages of Utilitarianism (1861) J.S. Mill distinguished between the kind of proof available for empirical reality and that available for moral and aesthetic absolutes:

Questions of ultimate ends are not amenable to direct proof. Whatever can be proved to be good, must be so by being shown to be a means to something admitted to be good without proof. . . . The formula may be accepted or rejected, but is not a subject of what is commonly understood by proof . . . . Considerations may be presented capable of determining the intellect either to give or withhold its assent to the doctrine; and this is equivalent to proof.<sup>53</sup>

In other words, in some of the most important areas of decision-making and action man has no access to "proof" that his principles of action are valid.

Cardinal Newman was more precise in his explanation of the difference between the kinds of proof to which empirical and moral truths are susceptible:

My argument is in outline as follows: that that absolute certitude which we were able to possess, whether as to the truths of natural theology, or as to the fact of a revelation, was the result of an assemblage of concurring and converging probabilities, and that both according to the constitution of the human mind and the will of its Maker; that certitude was a habit of mind, that certainty was a quality of propositions; that probabilities which did not reach to logical certainty, might create a mental certitude; that the certitude thus created might equal in measure and strength the certitude which was created by the strictest scientific demonstration;



and that to have such certitude might in given cases and to given individuals be a plain duty, though not to others in other circumstances.<sup>54</sup>

Newman here limits certainty to propositions, as did Hume, and speaks of both scientific and religious conviction as certitude.

T. H. Huxley made a similar assertion of the limitation of that which can be known. Unlike Mill and Newman, Huxley was not willing to grant "certitude" about ideas other than those susceptible to scientific proof. In fact he gave much more credit to the possibility of scientific method producing "knowledge" than either they or his confessed teachers, Hume and Kant:

My mind steadily gravitated towards the conclusions of Hume and Kant, so well stated by the latter in a sentence, which I have quoted elsewhere.

"The greatest and perhaps the sole use of all philosophy of pure reason is, after all, merely negative, since it serves not as an organon for the enlargement of knowledge, but as a discipline for its delimitation, and instead of discovering truth, has only the modest merit of preventing error." . . . I had, and have, the firmest conviction that I never left the verace via--the straight road; and that this road led nowhere else but into the dark depths of a wild and tangled forest . . . . It is quite true that the ground of every one of our actions, and the validity of all our reasonings, rest upon the great act of faith which leads us to take the experience of the past as a safe guide in our dealings with the future. . . . Because we are often obliged, by the pressure of events, to act on very bad evidence, it does not follow that it is proper to act on such evidence when the pressure is absent. . . . Agnosticism . . . lies in the rigorous application of a single principle . . . . Positively the principle may be expressed: In matters of the intellect, follow your reason as far as it will take you, without regard to any other consideration. And negatively: In matters of the intellect, do not pretend that conclusions are certain which are not demonstrated or demonstrable.<sup>55</sup>

Huxley's willingness to draw conclusions only upon facts accessible to scientific method explains his prophesy of the extinction of





society in the evolutionary process.<sup>56</sup> Yet it seems that in such a prediction he commits himself to knowledge of the negation of traditional ideas of man, God and immortality, ideas about which, according to Kant and Hume, there can be no knowledge.

Although certainty of ethical and religious absolutes is not possible, neither is it possible for society to exist as a structured, functionable unit without some ethical code, some agreement upon standards of human conduct in man's dealings with each other. This is the implication of Mill's statement that speculative philosophy is the thing on earth that most influences men. Each act implies some assumption, conscious or not, about the nature of things and about fit patterns of conduct. For minds such as those of Mill, Tennyson and Newman it is necessary to formulate as logical and consistent a basis for action--a speculative philosophy--as possible. That Tennyson did arrive at what was for him an acceptable position is obvious. The difference in tone between early poems such as "The Miller's Daughter" or "The Vision of Sin" and late poems such as "The Ancient Sage" or "Demeter and Persephone" is sufficient evidence quite apart from the Idylls, which is clearly an exposition of a particular moral code. But he never confused certainty with certitude, knowledge with wisdom. In the last years of his life he proclaimed himself an Agnostic, with the qualification that he had a strong positive hope, unlike some Agnostics.<sup>57</sup>

The distinction between knowledge and wisdom is clearly set out in In Memoriam. Upon this distinction depends his idea of the phenomenal and noumenal worlds, and of their inter-dependence.





Unlike Hume and like Huxley, he speaks of knowledge as the product of empirical and rational modes of perception: "We have but faith: we cannot know,/ For knowledge is of things we see" (163: Prologue). The same connotation is evident in "Locksley Hall" (1860), where the hero complains that scientific and technical progress is not equalled by moral progress; ~~for~~ "Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers" (93:141). Wisdom he associates with noumenal ideas. The invocation of the elegy closes with the plea: "And in thy wisdom make me wise" (163). Lyric CXXIV speaks of wisdom as the religious faith which provides certitude. All the prophet-figures in his poems--Merlin, Tiresias, the Ancient Sage and Akbar--are spoken of as wise men who have a comprehensive vision of the world, one which subsumes the merely empirical.

Invariably he speaks of knowledge as less reliable than wisdom as a basis for action:

Who loves not Knowledge? Who shall rail  
 Against her beauty? May she mix  
 With men and prosper! Who shall fix  
 Her pillars? Let her work prevail.

But on her forehead sits a fire;  
 . . . . .  
 Half-grown as yet, a child, and vain--  
 She cannot fight the fear of death.  
 What is she, cut from love and faith,  
 But some wild Pallas from the brain

Of demons? . . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 Let her know her place;  
 She is the second, not the first.

A higher hand must make her mild,  
 If all be not in vain, and guide  
 Her footsteps, moving side by side  
 With Wisdom, like the younger child;



For she is earthly of the mind,  
 But Wisdom heavenly of the soul. (192: CXIV)

Because knowledge deals with a limited aspect of human experience its contributions must be placed within a spiritual perspective before they can have even limited value.

One of the major themes of Idylls of the King is that judgments made upon data provided by the reason and the senses are not reliable. "Geraint and Enid" begins with a lament that we forge a lifelong trouble for ourselves by taking true for false and false for true. Geraint's marriage begins to disintegrate and his whole personality becomes distorted when he accepts the evidence of his ears that Enid is not a true wife, and when he makes a reasonable interpretation of her words---that she is an adulteress. Only when he trusts her love rather than his ears does he regain his mental health. Merlin tells Gareth that unless he is willing to enter Camelot in defiance of the warning of his eyes that the city is an illusion, and unless he is willing to take Arthur's unreasonable vows, he must remain without among the animals of the field. This may be an oblique reference to the Old Testament tale of Nebuchadnezzar, who, when "weighed in the balances and found wanting" because he would not accept the Hebrew religious sensibility, lost his sanity and spent seven years outside the city eating grass in the fields. The reference is reinforced by Arthur at the end of the Idylls, when he tells Bedivere that without a religious sensibility men are little better than sheep



or goats that nourish a blind life within the brain.<sup>58</sup>

These poetic expressions of the illusoriness of the material world Tennyson repeated privately:

What, after all, is 'matter'? Is it not merely the shadow of a something greater than itself, and which we poor short-sighted creatures cannot see? . . . There are moments when this flesh is nothing to me, when I feel and know the flesh to be the vision, God and the spiritual the only real & true--depend upon it, the spiritual is the real, it belongs to one more than the hands & the feet.<sup>59</sup>

Two questions arise in the face of Tennyson's claim that there is an order of reality not accessible by the usual modes of acquiring knowledge. First, upon what grounds does he believe his position more valid than that, say, of Huxley, who saw only "the dark depths of a wild and tangled forest," or of Mill, who explained all ethical and aesthetic values in terms of pleasure-pain motivation and the doctrine of association? Second, on what grounds can any particular expression of the noumenal be assessed? Is it possible to judge whether or not St. Simeon Stylites, the May Queen, Sir Galahad or even Arthur himself are either pious frauds or simply misled? How can Tennyson criticize the Evangelical woman who visits Rizpah, the hero of "Locksley Hall" who considers "the gray barbarian lower than the Christian child," or King Pellam, who collects religious relics?

The first step in Tennyson's movement toward certitude is his observation that moral and religious experience is a fact of life common to all people. The motto to "Akbar's Dream,"





a poem concerned with the problem of conflict between different religions, begins:

O God, in every temple I see people that see thee, and  
in every language I hear spoken, people praise thee . . . .  
Each religion says, "Thou art one, without equal." . . .  
Heresy to the heretic and religion to the orthodox,  
But the dust of the rose-petal belongs to the heart of the  
perfume-seller. (Oxford:817)

Experience of noumenal reality may be distorted by the orthodox as well as by the heretical, but a kernel remains, common to all men and distinct in kind. The theme of "The Palace of Art" is that without a moral commitment even the most informed life is sterile. The Soul is "Lord over Nature, lord of the visible earth,/ Lord of the senses five" (45:179-180), but she falls howling, "struck thro' with pangs of hell," because she has decided to "sit as God, holding no form of creed," and to ignore the "riddle of the painful earth" as it flashes through her. Her plight is described in imagery similar to that describing Merlin locked in an oak by the sensual Vivien, the snake-woman who argues that human instincts do not have moral implications any more than do animal instincts. The Soul,

. . . mouldering with the dull earth's mouldering sod,  
Inwapt tenfold in slothful shame,  
Lay there exiled from eternal God,  
Lost to her place and name. (46:261-265)

Her only means of attaining mental health is to retire to a cottage to mourn and pray, and to associate with other dwellers of the vale, communicating her insights to them.

"A Dream of Fair Women" also suggests that experience



of noumenal reality is the only means of coming to terms with the darkness of life. As the poet walks through a wood which extends "until the end of time" he is depressed and bewildered that "in every land that light illumineth/ Beauty and anguish walk hand-in-hand the downward slope to death." Only Jephthah's daughter, of all the "far-renowned brides of ancient song," is able to accept the pain of her circumstance. She alone has a light-footed step and a song of joy, in contrast to Cleopatra's song of defiance and power and to the lamentations of Iphigenia and Rosamund. When pitied she objects that she would relive the "tragedy" a thousand times, for as a result she gained a transcendent vision:

I  
 Saw God divide the night with flying flame,  
     And thunder on the everlasting hills.  
 I heard Him, for He spake, and grief became  
     A solemn scorn of ill. (57:225-228)

There is an element in her experience radically different than any in that of the others.

The same radical difference is obvious in "The Vision of Sin." The poem records the degeneration of a youth who commits a "crime of sense" (114:213). The youth rides a "horse with wings, that would have flown,/ But that his heavy rider kept him down" (111:3-4). The image is probably an allusion to the myth of Pegasus and Bellerophon. Bellerophon was master of Pegasus, the winged horse, thanks to the favour of the goddess Athena. He himself had divine ancestry, for he was the son of Poseidon. Pegasus



enabled him to conquer the Chimaera, a monster compounded of lion, goat and serpent. The moral implications of the Chimaera image are clear enough. The implication of Tennyson's poem seems to be that the youth degenerates because his "heaviness"--his crime of sense--prevents him from conquering the Chimaera, from flying up to the hills, where every morn "God made himself an awful rose of dawn." This rose, together with "an answer peal'd from that high land,/ But in a tongue no man could understand" (114:222-223), is the only source of hope.

Tennyson did not agree with the materialist's explanation that all religious experience was rooted in and the product of natural law alone. "Lucretius" (1868) is an ironic treatment of such explanations, which were championed by the Positivist movement. Lucretius, the poet-scientist-philosopher who wrote De Rerum Natura in the first century B.C., attempted to interpret all human experience in terms of matter and an early version of the atomic theory. If the soul is only matter then man is mortal, and if the natural world is governed solely by laws of physics, then man is indeed freed from his age-old fear of death and of the gods. The irony occurs when Lucilia, his wife, becomes jealous, suspecting that time supposedly spent working out his theories is in fact spent with a mistress. She goes to a witch, obtains a love-philtre and covertly mixes it with his drink. The philtre, "tickling the brute brain within the man's/ Made havoc among those tender cells, and check'd/ His power to shape" (275:21-24). He





has weird erotic dreams, and in desperation calls upon the gods for succour. Horrified at this uncontrollable element in his nature, and at discovering a duality he had hitherto not admitted, he commits suicide. His death is caused by a witch, in whom he does not believe; by his own lust, which he had argued could be controlled; and by the vengeance of Venus, one of the gods who, according to his theory, have no interest in the affairs of men. Although all these "causes" may be explained by his failure to assess correctly certain phenomena, his theories still have not enabled him to suppress his own moral and religious sensibility.<sup>60</sup>

If ethical and religious experience is inaccessible to empirical and rational analysis, what then is to be done? Kant asked the same question and answered that when it is not possible to proceed from object to idea it is necessary to proceed from idea to object, beginning with the assumption that there is a truth to which the idea corresponds. Kant used Copernicus' method as a precedent, remarking that when the astronomer found himself unable to prove the sun did not revolve around the world, he proceeded by assuming the reverse. Only by such a method can the gestalt of the perceptual process be explored, and can any conclusions be accepted or rejected on logical or practical grounds. Tennyson seems to have operated according to the same method. His early poems recognize the prevalence of the religious and moral sensibility, and then, in spite of the failure of traditional methods of proof, proceed to explore the "truths" to which this



sensibility points.

One of the first assumptions he accepted was that man's tendency to speculate about the extra-phenomenal, a tendency which distinguishes him from animals, indicates that he has an extra-phenomenal nature and is in some way divine. He remarked that evolutionary theory could not explain the self-conscious mind of man.<sup>61</sup> In In Memoriam he said:

I think we are not wholly brain,  
Magnetic mockeries; . . .  
. . . . .  
Not only cunning casts in clay:  
Let Science prove we are, and then  
What matters Science unto men,  
At least to me? . . .  
. . . . .  
. . . I was born to other things. (194:CXX)

One of the major tasks of King Arthur was to facilitate the development of the divine in man and to suppress his animal nature. The Ancient Sage argues that man is indeed made by the gods:

But some in yonder city hold, my son,  
That none but gods could build this house of ours,  
So beautiful, vast, various, so beyond  
All work of man, yet like all work of man,  
A beauty with defect--till That which knows,  
And is not known, but felt thro' what we feel  
Within ourselves is highest, shall descend  
On this half-deed, and shape it at the last  
According to the Highest in the Highest. (449:83-90)

These lines express quite clearly the Platonic conception of the divinity of man, although a Christian element is evident in the allusion to the Incarnation. Both Arthur Hallam and King Arthur are spoken of as human and divine, as examples of human potential (184:LXXXVII;313:116).

Tennyson's belief that man is made in the image of God has striking parallels in the Cambridge Platonist idea of natural



reason and natural revelation, in the Kantian idea of the Practical Reason and in the Coleridgean idea of the Reason. In each case certain moral and religious ideas which could not be explained by means of phenomena observable in the animal world were attributed to a divine characteristic peculiar to man.

Although Tennyson clearly stated his beliefs he was hesitant to endorse any single creed or expression of these ideas. During his Cambridge days he disagreed with the thirty-nine articles of the Established Church,<sup>62</sup> and usually sided with the Latitudinarians, led by Maurice. They insisted that although some form of religious expression is necessary, no one creed is superior and no one is devoid of truth. (This aspect of Maurice's belief was derived from the Cambridge Platonists, who were first branded Latitudinarians). On occasion the poet shocked his company by saying that he thought the Turkish religion a very good alternative to Christianity.<sup>63</sup>

Rather than endorse a creed he wanted to establish whether or not any belief in spiritual truths was either warranted, necessary or possible in the light of the direction of nineteenth-century society and of the discoveries in the scientific world, together with their implications upon the religious world. The three ideas which he does speak of consistently as the core of all religious belief are that man has an innate moral sensibility, the idea of God and the idea of immortality. These he treats as proceeding from the divine nature of man.

The belief that man has an innate moral sensibility is





the most obvious in the canon as a whole. Once this first is accepted the other two follow almost as corollaries. He is quite explicit in In Memoriam:

Tho' truths in manhood darkly join,  
     Deep-seated in our mystic frame,  
     We yield all blessing to the name  
 Of Him that made them current coin.  
 . . . . .  
 And so the Word had breath. (172:XXXVI)

Those moral tenets which now are the basis of Christian doctrine he believes to be "deep-seated in our mystic frame" and expressed in the Incarnation.

In the lines immediately following he apologizes for his presumption in expressing theological ideas, but explains that they were Hallam's, and are "dear to me as sacred wine/ To dying lips." He may have had in mind Hallam's poetic statement that Dante spoke of "ancient truth, that springs/ Prime in the heart of man,"<sup>64</sup> or possibly passages from the "Theodicaea Novissima," Tennyson was responsible for having this essay included in Hallam's Remains (1834), which were being published about the same time he was writing these two lyrics.<sup>65</sup> The essay, which is an attempt "to contribute to the completion of a true intellectual system" by treating Christianity in its connection with other elements of knowledge, and especially with "the main facts of our moral and rational constitution,"<sup>66</sup> argues that man is made in the image of God and that "the great error of the Deistical mode of arguing is the assumption that intellect is something more pure and akin to Divinity, than emotion."<sup>67</sup> In other words, man's feelings are "akin to Divinity" and at least as valid a guide to an understanding of the Deity as the intellect.



One of the recurrent references to the moral sensibility of man in the Idylls is Arthur's admonition that the knights must keep their word, for "Man's word is God in man" (357:8). When a knight gives his word he makes a moral commitment. To renege is to lower himself back into the beast, frustrating his divine sensibility. Moreover, the knights must "reverence the King, as if he were/ Their conscience, and their conscience as their King" (440:465-466). As Arthur swears them to vows of Christian virtue, so their conscience dictates divine truths. In The Princess one of the arguments for the concept of marriage as "union in difference" rather than as a union of equals is that woman is "truer to the law within" than man.<sup>68</sup> Whether or not the discrimination is valid the statement takes for granted "the law within," which in the context is clearly a moral law. The chief argument for the concept of marriage which is urged in the poem is that "The woman's cause is man's: they rise or sink/ Together, dwarf'd or godlike, bond or free" (159:242-3). This cause is moral and intellectual growth. The assumption beneath it is that a moral ideal exists towards which growth is possible, and that man is sensitive to that ideal.

The second major idea suggested by the divine nature of man is the idea of God. In 1851 Tennyson wrote "De Profundis," a meditation on the origin and destiny of man occasioned by the birth of his eldest son Hallam. He speaks of the child having come "out of the deep,/ From that true world within the world we



see," created by the divine They (according to the Orthodox idea of the Trinity). Man is "a shatter'd phantom of that infinite One," and a "human riddle of the Infinite one." According to an undated notebook fragment, the "strange riddle of the human heart" is that man has "mode to know & fire to love the best/ And highest but must fall down . . . to the very spirit of evil itself."<sup>69</sup> The published poem describes the child as morally free, able to

choose; and still depart  
From death to death thro' life and life, and find  
Nearer and ever nearer Him, who wrought  
Not matter, nor the finite-infinite,  
But this main-miracle, that thou art thou,  
With power on thine own act and on the world. (484)

This is a lyric statement, which is to say a private and spontaneous expression of the poet's response to life. Here there is no doubt about his belief in man's finite-infinite nature, his innate moral sensibility and consciousness of God, or his ability to progress through various phases of an "ever-heightening life" (483).

"The Ancient Sage" contains a similar statement.<sup>70</sup> When the young cynical poet complains ("A THOUSAND summers ere the birth of Christ") that he cannot know whether the Nameless exists, as He has never shown his face on earth, the Sage answers:

If thou wouldst hear the Nameless, and wilt dive  
Into the temple-cave of thine own self,  
There, brooding by the central altar; thou  
Mayst haply learn the Nameless hath a voice,  
By which thou wilt abide, if thou be wise,  
As if thou knewest, tho' thou canst not know. (498:31-36)

These lines, spoken a thousand years before Christ, when placed beside the allusion to the possibility of an Incarnation (499:82f), are a variation of the argument in lyric XXXVI of In Memoriam,





quoted above. That is, within man is "a central altar" at which he can discover spiritual truths, truths embodied in the Incarnation. The specific truths mentioned are the existence of a moral law and of God.

In "Akbar's Dream" Tennyson argues that the idea of God is in fact the chief element of every religion. Akbar anticipates the day when the many distortions of truth will be suppressed and all temples will join in a common faith. Meanwhile, the many forms and creeds are expressions of:

The Spiritual in Nature's market-place--  
The silent Alphabet-of-heaven-in-man  
Made vocal--banners blazoning a Power  
That is not seen and rules from far away. (Oxford:819)

This Alphabet, "when fine Philosophies would fail, [draws] / The crowd from wallowing in the mire of earth" by convincing them of the existence of God.

The third major idea which Tennyson accepts is the idea of immortality. It, too, is derived from "the god within":

The wish that of the living whole  
No life may fail beyond the grave,  
Derives it not from what we have  
The likeliest God within the soul? (176:LV)

We wish that other men will "live beyond the grave" because (apart from our egocentric instinct for self-preservation) we treasure moral ideals they embody. The recognition of moral ideals is itself a godlike quality. The view that immortality implies the conservation of value underlies a statement Tennyson made to Milnes:



I think I can see as far as any one can see in this twilight that the nobler nature does not pass from its individuality when it passes out of this one life.<sup>71</sup>

It is also expressed by Bedivere when, just before the last battle, Arthur dreaming hears Gawain warning him that all delight is hollow, and that although for Arthur an isle of rest is prepared, for him, Gawain, there is only a wandering wind. Bedivere's explanation of the dream is: "Light was Gawain in life, and light in death/  
Is Gawain, for the ghost is as the man" (444:29f).

Tennyson is fairly explicit about the nature of immortality in In Memoriam. He speaks of self-consciousness, individuality and growth. Idylls of the King is less explicit. In fact some critics interpret Bedivere's cry that the King will come again as Tennyson's statement that great men will always rise up to lead civilization.<sup>72</sup> This is not the understanding of the characters within the poem, however. In "Guinevere" Arthur and Guinevere speak as Tennyson did when he mourned for Hallam. When Arthur admonishes Bedivere to pray for his soul he clearly thinks of himself as entering upon personal immortality.

These three ideas--of man's innate moral sense, of God and of immortality--are prevalent in Tennyson's middle and later poetry. Out of them arise his view of evil and of history. But the question still arises as to his reasons for accepting them as more adequate than any others as a basis for action. Can they be shown to be more acceptable than their counterassertions, for example? Throughout his writings can be found three reasons or,



as Newman would say, three converging probabilities upon which he made his commitment to this position. These are the grounds of universality, coherence and coerciveness, which can be summed up in a pragmatic test.<sup>73</sup> He argued that these ideas are common elements throughout human society, that they do not contain contradictory elements and in fact satisfy primary drives of the human spirit. Moreover, they make insistent demands upon man, whether or not he bows to these demands. When he does not his personality disintegrates; when he does he is confronted with even greater demands. Finally, the three ideas fulfil a summary test of pragmatism: they provide a practical means of establishing a code of social conduct. In effect it is only necessary to establish Tennyson's arguments for the first major idea--that man has a moral sensibility--for once this is accepted the others offer little real resistance.

The argument that the general assent of mankind to a particular idea is an indication of its validity was used by Newman as one of the converging probabilities which could contribute to certitude of spiritual truths. Coleridge and Kant used the same argument.<sup>74</sup> Alone, it is quite unreliable, admittedly, but at least these minds saw some value in it when used as one of many arguments tending toward the same conclusion. Idylls of the King describes a microcosmic society in which Arthur's vows express the moral law. They are able to raise men out of the beast, as Merlin tells Gareth and as Tristram, the rebellious knight, testifies.





Moreover, they are given by Arthur, the man in whom God has breathed "a secret word," according to the knights' hymn of allegiance. The knights chant: "The King will follow Christ, and we the King" (311:487f). This link between the vows, the word, and Christ is another echo of lyric XXXVI of In Memoriam, another indication that the moral sense is in some way divine. The interpretation is further supported by Tennyson's statement that he intended Arthur to represent the soul and the knights to represent the various passions of man.<sup>75</sup> None of those who oppose the vows do so on the grounds that they are false. They argue only that the vows are too idealistic, that Arthur has no ultimate authority, or simply that they dislike the restrictions imposed upon them. At one point or another each one who opposes the vows admits their validity.

Vivien, who to her naive squire and to Balin presents a rational argument to the effect that the world of the sense and instincts is the sole arbiter of deeds, admits to the much more alert and subtle Mark that she is "the little rat that bores in the dyke," that because she has been raised in the dirt she has grown to like it and therefore opposes the Round Table, and that any other motivation comes from jealousy and spite. Tristram admits that the vows lifted him up above himself and enabled him to do mightier deeds than else he could have done, but defends his renunciation by arguing that to try to be pure is unrealistic, that Arthur has no right to bind him, and that the King himself is



only a man. When Lancelot accuses him of having blood on his hands Tristram agrees, and can only counter with: "Thou nor I have made the world" (425:203). The Red Knight defies the Round Table not on the grounds that the vows are false, but that as they have on occasion been broken, it is better not to try to keep them, in the name of honesty. The same agreement comes from Guinevere, who although she has earlier accused Arthur of the coldness of perfection and the inhumanity of Godliness, at the last cries out: "Now I see thee what thou art,/ Thou art the highest and most human too" (442:643-644). This label Tennyson earlier applied to Hallam and to Christ in In Memoriam. Guinevere's cry is possibly an allusion to the New Testament incident in which a man "with an unclean spirit" cried out to Christ: "I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God."<sup>76</sup>

The universal assent in the microcosm of the Idylls has its counterparts in the smaller poems. It was pointed out above as a major theme in "Akbar's Dream." Elsewhere Tennyson says that there is no man so low that he does not in his better moments recognize a lower and a higher, who does not have a moral sensibility.<sup>77</sup> Tennyson is uneasy with the suggestion that morality may be purely relative, that a set of values may be right in one society or for one person but wrong for another. This is not a contradiction of the element of relativity in morality, it is an assertion that the moral sense corresponds to truths of a noumenal order. It is true that each moral act is a finite expression of that absolute, and therefore



is never pure. For instance, the self-abnegation which St. Simeon Stylites speaks of is a virtue in abstraction, although not in his particular case, for he has made it into a tool of self-interest. We judge the act, not the ideal. Similarly, the heroic determination of "Ulysses" is a virtue if considered in abstraction. But the enormity of Ulysses' pride, together with his scorn for his people, his wife, his son and his household gods are mitigating factors.

A second argument for the validity of the moral sense is that it is orderly, coherent, and regular rather than mystical or chaotic. Kant spoke of this qualification as one of the criteria on which he founded the credibility of his idea of moral law.<sup>78</sup> If the moral sense is valid it should not contain contradictory elements and should effect a measure of maturity and integration in the personality which conforms to it.

The coherence of Arthur's vows is symbolized by the theme of music which runs throughout the Idylls. When the knighthood is all one will, the city is filled with "a healthful people" who "move to music." But when Camelot, the city built to music, begins to disintegrate under the influence of Vivien, Modred and Tristram, the music loses its harmony. The first appearance of Vivien is described in these words:

But now the wholesome music of the wood  
Was dumb'd by one from out the hall of Mark.  
A damsel-errant, warbling, as she rode  
The woodland alleys, Vivien, with her squire. (363)

Vivien's song is a denial of Arthur's vows, and "dumbs" the music





not only in his court but in the very woods to whose "tune" she professes to adhere with her deification of the instincts. Similarly, Tristram's music is a twangle, broken music "made in the woods" (426:251f). Dagonet contrasts the music of Tristram to the sphere-music of "Arthur's harp" (the name of a particular star-configuration). The implied contrast between sense and soul can hardly be overlooked.

The coherence of the vows is underlined by Arthur's insistence that they cannot be contradicted, even in battle. Therefore Lancelot, the greatest of the knights, the most chivalrous, gracious and human in the court, treats Modred with courtesy when he is found eavesdropping. The knighthood are committed to "the scorn of scorn, the hatred of hatred" as well as to the love of love. One of the indications of the moral decay of the knights is the lack of mercy with which they trample the Red Knight and his people. This deed is in stark contrast to the impartial justice and mercy of Arthur's court early in his reign, which Gareth watches in amazement, and to Geraint's gentle treatment of his fallen foe Elyrn. In those times the most bitter enemy had been treated courteously.

The motif of harmony appears in "Sea Dreams" (1860), where it has a similar connotation. The wife, more forgiving than her husband when the two have been cheated of their little supply of money by an unscrupulous investment dealer, has a dream that goes to music. Her dream is of lines of cliffs on which are built huge cathedrals from every age. A belt of light surrounding the world, from which issues a low music, meets the cliffs and they



crash. Other generations try to rebuild the Cathedrals and the statues of their founders, and quarrel with those who would let them lie. But all the wrangling is carried on in the midst of music, with which it is never out of tune. The husband, who can think only of the money he has lost, dreams of a dark cavern, of a woman of the earth (symbol of work), and of a visionary gleam of gold. His dream is filled with roaring thunder and the crash of foundering ships. Throughout the poem the wife's forgiving spirit and sensitivity to human suffering is contrasted with her husband's grasping nature. This emphasis, together with the chief distinction between their dreams--that hers is able to achieve a perspective which transcends tragedy and attains harmony--is another comment on the validity of the moral sense.

In "Maud" the harmonizing influence of a moral experience is perhaps more obvious than in any other poem. The hero enters in a state of affronted moral sensibility. He damns society because of the evils within it, and withdraws in an effort to preserve his purity. But in fact he is withdrawing to an unrealistic and sterile world of self-worship. Only as he begins to fall in love and lose his self-concern do the images change from those of disharmony to harmony, do the stars become playful rather than iron tyrants, and does the whole of nature soften. All is because "in this stormy gulf" he has found "a pearl, the countercharm of space and sky," he has lost himself in love. His love cannot



be dismissed as animal instinct finding release through fulfillment, for it results in heightened moral sensibility, horror at the evil which remains in him, and determination "to fight with mortal wrongs" (208:652). Therefore his cry: "I have walked awake with truth" (209:687) cannot be brushed off as hyperbole.

A third argument for the validity of the moral sense in man is its quality of coerciveness. Not only is the moral sense universal, not only does it produce harmony when acted upon, but also it obligates, even when denied. In other words although an individual denies his moral sense it will live to haunt him. It produces harmony when given its head, but discord when denied. Furthermore, as the moral sense gains prominence it makes increasing demands upon the subject. This is why Arthur's vows are described as impossible to keep. The more true the follower, the more demanding the law. Only in this way, as Tristram says, is man raised out of the beast.

Lancelot and Tristram are patent examples of the coerciveness of the moral sense. When Lancelot breaks the moral law he is driven into the wilds, not by external forces but by his own spirit. His guilty love

Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time;  
 . . . . .  
 His mood was often like a fiend, and rose  
 And drove him into wastes and solitudes  
 For agony, who was yet a living soul. (384:246,250-252)

As in the case of Maud's lover, his crime drives him to insanity.





The coerciveness of the moral law is also evident in The Princess. Ida founds her college upon dedication to the intellectual improvement of women as a means of achieving equality with and perhaps superiority over the male world. The expense of her commitment is the sacrifice of all relationships with men and children, which means a severe limitation of her moral sphere. She insists that knowledge and power are the highest values. As a result her own nature is hardened, along with that of her maidens. Her dream is finally broken not on the inability of the women to achieve the intellectual heights of men, but on the inadequacy and sterility of life under such a limitation. Normalcy comes to the college only when "Love in the sacred halls/[Holds] carnival at will" (156:69-70). The Prince recovers from his weird seizures, which occur only after his love receives a rebuttal, at the moment Ida finally accepts him. When the moral sensibility is suppressed, the personality is inevitably distorted. Tennyson is stating that the issue of intellectual capacity is a minor one in the question of female emancipation. Until women learn to accept their role of moral interaction with the male world--as friends, lovers and parents--they will only increase their isolation and powerlessness.

Tennyson's frequent use of light as a symbol of moral truth is another means of expressing coerciveness. Moral truth, like light, is necessary for life and growth. To extinguish either leads to death. It is a controlling image in all the major poems. The Prologue to In Memoriam describes God as light, of which man's little



systems are "but broken lights," and concludes with the prayer that man may be able to bear the light. Hallam appears in a dream on a ship with shining sides, and like King Arthur is carried off by the burial ship into light. Moreover, his struggle for faith is described as a struggle toward the light (187:XCVI). Most of the key moral and religious passages in the Idylls contain light imagery. Light fills Arthur's coronation scene, hovers about the towers of Camelot, flashes from Excalibur, from the shields of the mightiest knights, and illuminates the field of battle when the Round Table is at its height. In contrast, the last battle is covered by darkness and fog, as is the closing scene between Guinevere and Arthur and the waste places where wander the knights who have pursued the Grail. Pellam, Mark and the Red Knight dwell in halls of darkness and gloom. At climactic moments of both "Maud" and The Princess Phosphor and Hesper become one, evening and morning blend their lights to shut out the darkness between. "The Ancient Sage" and "Demeter and Persephone," both of which deal primarily with moral progress, are filled with light imagery. The only hope for the child of sense in "The Vision of Sin" is to look toward the "awful rose of Dawn" on the hills. The minor poem "Epitaph on Caxton" makes the link between light and truth quite explicit.

#### Fiat Lux

THY prayer was 'Light--more Light--while Time shall last!'  
 Thou sawest a glory growing on the night,  
 But not the shadows which that Light would cast,  
 Till shadows vanish in the Light of Light. (515)

The final summary test of these three complementary criteria



of truth is pragmatic, for it is the urgency of the need to establish a viable ethical code which first prompts the exploration of non-phenomenal truths. Are the truths which Tennyson accepts practical? In Memoriam is a lyric statement that they enabled him to come to terms with a grief which threatened to destroy him. The Princess claims that they must form the basis for an enlightened and realistic solution of the Feminists' quarrels with the social structure. "Maud" suggests that they are a positive means of dealing with social ills. They are a valid alternative to the hero's cynical and sterile condemnation of society, a condemnation which has risen from a naive idealistic absolutism which judges every human act in terms of black and white, right and wrong. Idylls of the King sets these truths of the spirit in a micro-cosmic society. In the strength of Arthur's vows and the commitment of his knights to them the King not only built a realm and reigned, but built a better and higher realm than any which had preceded it. Tennyson tries to show that these major ideas are pragmatic not only in his own life but potentially in the lives of all men.

These tests of the reasonableness of Tennyson's vision may also be applied to other visions. For example, Tristram's code of ethics fails to meet the criteria of universality, by his own admission. When Isolte asks if she, too, can operate according to the theory "free field, free love, we love but while we may," he threatens to strangle her. The Grail quest cannot meet the test of pragmatism. It destroys the Round Table, prevents the accomplishment of noble deeds, and wrecks the lives of all those





who pursue it. Moreover, it is immoral in the most formal sense of that word, for it prohibits all meaningful human relationships by causing those who follow it to treat other men and women as shadows. When these tests are applied to some of the heroes in the early dramatic monologues it exposes their pious protestations as fraudulent. For neither St. Simeon Styles, St. Agnes, Sir Galahad (in the 1842 poem) nor the May Queen have a vision which can meet the pragmatic test. All distort the virtues of self-renunciation, humility and repentance (which in the abstract may be laudable enough) by considering them means of currying divine favour. All three speakers are frauds, egotistically emulating these virtues in order to procure a comfortable spot in heaven. None display the virtues disinterestedly, as the natural result of their awareness of the brightness of Truth and their own comparative inadequacy. Understandably, therefore, they succeed only in isolating themselves from other men. Tennyson's answer to these is best expressed in In Memoriam, where he affirms the true perspective of moral acts: "For merit lives from man to man/ And not from man, O Lord, to Thee" (163:Prologue).

When all the converging probabilities which lead Tennyson to accept the existence of non-phenomenal reality are laid out, the emphasis clearly falls upon subjective rather than objective grounds for faith. The nature of the absolutes in which Tennyson believes is such that they are not susceptible to objective analysis or demonstration. This is not to say that absolutes are the less significant or operative in the human mind. When in



In Memoriam Tennyson says that although every traditional defense of faith may fail he is able to "feel" the truth, he is making a statement psychologically valid although rationally incongruous. This emphasis on the subjective grounds for faith is the most important contribution of the early influences upon him-- of the Cambridge Platonists, Kant and Coleridge. As he moved in this direction he moved away from the Baconian tendency to separate the provinces of scientific and religious investigation and toward the more integrated view of human experience common in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, toward the view expressed by the rising social sciences. He founded the Metaphysical Society and became a founding member of Sidgwick's Psychical Society in a conscious attempt to give impetus to such a movement among the leaders of the Victorian world.



## SUMMARY

Throughout his life Tennyson sought adequate grounds for belief in moral absolutes, in the existence of God and in personal immortality. He was distressed at the opposition he saw between science and religion, for he sensed in this opposition a threat to the integrity of the human spirit. Three significant forces influenced his thinking: the Cambridge Platonist movement, Immanuel Kant and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Each of these, like Tennyson, recognized the contributions of both science and religion to human civilization. Each looked for a means of limiting the negative impact of religion and science upon each other. In the writings of each are found the same major premises which appear throughout the Tennyson canon. Time and space limit the ability of man's mind and of his senses to make definitive statements about extra-phenomenal reality. But man has an inherent moral capability, a consciousness of moral values which provides a basis for interaction between the finite and the infinite. This divine aspect of man leads him to believe in the existence of God and in personal immortality. Such ideas are not of the kind accessible to knowledge, either negative or positive. They can only be accepted or rejected on the basis of what Newman described as "converging probabilities." Tennyson found at least three probabilities. First, a moral sensibility is common to men in all cultures and all ages. Second, the moral sensibility is coercive. It forces itself upon men, whether or not it is accepted. If it is accepted it can never be satisfied: moral perfection is





not attainable. If it is not accepted, the human spirit begins to degenerate. Third, it is harmonious: the moral sensibility contains elements which are mutually supportive rather than contradictory. Finally, a summary test for validating these ideas, for assuming their truth, is the test of pragmatism.

They provide a means for establishing a moral code; they are a source of hope for the individual man faced with death, with the finiteness of beauty and with the relative aspects of human morality.



## II

### THE PROBLEM OF EVIL: THE ABYSMAL DEEPS OF PERSONALITY

Between the idea  
And the reality  
Between the motion  
And the act  
Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom  
"The Hollow Men"

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground  
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.

Richard II

A survey of Tennyson's poetry indicates that he was fascinated by the intricacies of human personality, and particularly by the moral dilemmas in which men find themselves. His dramatic monologues are critical analyses of particular individuals in moral situations. As early as 1831 John Stuart Mill remarked:

Mr. Tennyson has a dangerous quality in that facility of impersonation on which we have remarked, and by which he enters so thoroughly into the most strange and wayward idiosyncracies of other men . . . . It must not degrade him into a poetical harlequin.<sup>1</sup>

Among the poems often not recognized as dramatic monologues but which do explore "wayward idiosyncracies of other men" are "Supposed Confessions . . . ," "The May Queen," the two Locksley Hall poems, "Ulysses," "Lucretius," "Tithonus" and "Rizpah." "Maud" consists of three dramatic monologues depicting stages in the hero's struggle against evil. In Memoriam explores the nature of man in order to find a means of overcoming both the evils inflicted upon him by nature and the evils contained within his personality. John Killham has pointed out that The Princess is an attempt to state more valid grounds for curtailing prejudice



against women than the grounds usually adopted by the feminist movement.<sup>2</sup> The poem shifts the emphasis from legal and moral "rights" based upon spurious arguments about the nature of women to an assessment of the peculiar strengths and abilities of women and of the contribution they can make to the moral progress of civilization. Idylls of the King is not so much a presentation of Arthur's Order in conflict with an evil and chaotic world as of the internal struggles of the knights: Camelot is destroyed from within. The dramas which form a historical trilogy record the nation's triumph over the evils of slavery to the Church (Queen Mary), to a foreign state (Harold) and to the monarchy (Becket). In each an important change in the direction of history is interpreted as the result of the influence of one or two individuals, and in particular, of their peculiar moral strengths and weaknesses.

Tennyson's interest in the nature of evil is closely related to his interest in epistemology. He had rejected rationalism and empiricism because of their overly simplified explanation of the human mind and because they were unable to deal satisfactorily with moral issues. When he came to the conclusion that moral absolutes do exist and that man has an innate moral sensibility he had then to explain why it is that evil persists, and to what extent the rational and empiricist explanations of evil are inadequate. Therefore it is not surprising that much of his poetry explores various manifestations of evil. In "The Palace





of Art" he suggests that the confusion and unhappiness which engulf man find their source in "the abysmal depths of personality." The Soul, indulging in sense and reason to the maximum, surrounds herself with artistic masterpieces of the Western world. But she isolates herself from the swinish people about her who "graze and wallow, breed and sleep" (45:201). In her pride she treats humanity as do St. Simeon and Ulysses, and speaks of people using the same images they use. Although "full oft the riddle of the painful earth/ Flash'd thro her as she sat alone" (45:213-214), she ignored it for three years. Then

God, before whom ever lie bare  
The abysmal depths of personality,  
Plagued her with sore despair. (45:222-224)

She fell howling, and did not begin the road back to health and sanity until she recognized that the source of her woe was within herself.

Other poems clearly imply that within man lies a major source of evil. Edgar is the villain of The Promise of May. He finds that "the promise" made by the Comtists and Utilitarians (on the condition that reason throw off the lingering traces of belief in soul, spirit and moral law imposed by a superstitious age) is never fulfilled, for the mysteries of his own nature are not so easily dealt with. Lucretius is destroyed by the irrational, immaterial elements deep in his unconscious mind which have escaped his most profound investigations. The Ancient Sage urges his young follower to "dive/ Into the temple-cave of thine own self" if he wishes to transcend the perspective



which can see all laughter and all tears as only vanity, which cannot anticipate light beyond the darkness. In other words, in his attempts to unriddle the universe Tennyson consistently looked into man rather than outward to the imposing external forces preying upon him.

In taking this direction he was once again following the lead of Hallam, Coleridge, Kant and the Cambridge Platonists. The phrase "the abysmal deeps of personality" was probably derived from Arthur Hallam's essay "Theodicaea Novissima." As mentioned above, Tennyson was responsible for having this essay included in the collection of his friend's literary remains edited by Hallam's father in 1834.<sup>3</sup> The essay, which is a defense of the doctrine of personal love for a personal God, argues that the only obstacle between man and God is man's own will, and that it is God "within whom alone rest the abysmal secrets of personality."<sup>4</sup> Hallam advocated exploring "other psychological opinions" and combining them with "the main facts of our moral and rational constitution" as a means of testing and supporting Christianity and "a true intellectual system."<sup>5</sup> (This last phrase may be an echo of Cudworth's True Intellectual System of the Universe").

It is not surprising that Tennyson's three favourite Coleridgean poems were "Kubla Khan," "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel." These more than any other of Coleridge's poems express insight into those aspects of the mind which intrigued Tennyson: the role of the unconscious, of non-rational causality, and of the complex phases of the psyche in man's struggle with



evil.<sup>6</sup> Kant, too, had argued that there is a "radical innate evil" within man which he must overcome in order to solve the problems of society and of the individual.<sup>7</sup> However, his analysis is lacking in the subtlety and depth of Coleridge and Tennyson's work. The Cambridge Platonists taught that evil was in part an adjunct of man's free will and that it could be quelled by growth in "right reason" towards God. They opposed the absolutist and determinist views of the extreme expressions of the scientific spirit, which had argued that man is a product of environment alone and that physical law could wholly explain man's tendency to work evil. On the other hand they opposed religious doctrines of predestination and original sin (this latter in the narrowest sense), and doctrines which asserted that man's nature could be analyzed with facility and his sanctification arranged by the application of simple formulas derived from literalistic interpretations of scripture. They argued in return that the overthrow of evil was a difficult and never-ending battle carried on within the mind and heart.

A number of important issues in Tennyson's poetry cannot be dealt with until his idea of evil has been explained. One of these is the relativity of morality, with which Robert Langbaum has dealt in The Poetry of Experience. Does Tennyson condemn Ulysses or St. Simeon Stylites, and if so on what grounds? How far are we meant to sympathize with the war stanzas in "Maud" or the denunciations of the Locksley Hall poems? Another problem





which is intriguing not only because of its complexity but because of its relation to Carlyle's theory of work is that of the opposition between the urge to act and the urge to escape into a world of dreams. To what extent can we sympathize with the Prince when in his weird seizures he gains a perspective which sees the Princess' college as a painted show? Is Galahad's vision of the Grail any less valid than Arthur's dream of an order triumphant over the heathen, the forest and the beast? Why should Balin's battle with the demon in the wood near Pellam's court be less successful than Gareth's tilts with the four phantom warriors Morning-Star, Noon-Sun, Evening-Star and Death? A final issue in the poetry which depends upon Tennyson's idea of evil is his view of history. On what grounds did he accept or reject the hopes of many that the future of civilization was a rosy one? What value did he find in tales of past civilizations? Are accusations that he became increasingly pessimistic with age valid?<sup>8</sup>

The most important issue for Tennyson in his assessment of evil is the degree of freedom which man has. He disagrees with two common schools of thought regarding the ability of the mind to overcome evil: determinism and voluntarism. Determinism gives little or no credit to the ability of the individual to transcend natural processes of cause and effect, or to radically alter the course of his own life or of history. Voluntarism, on the other hand, shows great confidence in man's ability to attain any goal which he can clearly perceive and rationally accept. As each school takes an extreme and naive view of man's freedom, so each



is unrealistic in assessing the nature and sources of evil.

One of the theories of human personality which leads to a deterministic view of man is naturalism. It looks on the laws of nature discovered by the rising sciences, sees parallels between human and non-human natural processes, and extrapolates to account for the whole "nature" of man. Jeremy Bentham claimed:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for these alone to point out what we ought to do as well as what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne.<sup>9</sup>

Bentham too easily equates right with pleasure, wrong with pain, and all man's motivation with the promptings of these "two sovereign masters" of nature. To attempt to thwart nature will result in certain failure and probable disaster. But what if the pleasures of two individuals conflict? In other words how can the pleasure-pain theory be adapted to a moral situation? John Stuart Mill attempted an answer by arguing that ideally and ultimately the greatest happiness of any one individual and that of every other individual are identical. However, while the world remains imperfect, the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number should determine the most useful course of action where private pleasures seem to conflict.<sup>10</sup> This attempt to avoid the anarchy inevitable in the pleasure-pain theory is half-hearted, however. Caroline Fox records that when Mill was pressed about the contradiction implied by preaching that "natural" self-interest will









Ring, trinket of the Church, but naked Nature  
In all her loveliness. (737:495-506)

Edward succeeds in seducing Dora and departs. When he returns years later, sees the results of his deed, and feels remorse, he soliloquizes in dismay:

O my God, if man be only  
A willy-nilly current of sensations--  
Reaction needs must follow revel--yet--  
Why feel remorse, he, knowing that he must have  
Moved in the iron grooves of Destiny?  
Nature a liar, making us feel guilty  
Of her own faults. (741:233-239)

The inconsistency of naturalism and determinism lies in their contradictory claims that man is solely governed by nature, and that primitive human institutions have allowed him to depart from natural process. What is the use of going to nature to find means of straightening out man if in fact man as he is with all his unhappiness is a product of nature?

Similar to the arguments of Edward are those of Vivien, Mark, Tristram and the Red Knight. Vivien advocates an enlightened freedom of response to the sexual instinct on the grounds that flora and fauna are governed by the reproductive urge. Her theme-song, "The fire of heaven is not the flame of hell," expresses her protest against the doctrine that natural impulses can destroy man, or have any potential for evil. In an early draft Tennyson presents her argument more explicitly:

The fire of heaven has given us all things good  
And chill not thou that fire within thy blood.  
But bathe with Vivien in the fiery flood.<sup>13</sup>

In her arguments with Balin and with Merlin Vivien takes the



position that moral acts are either black or white. She is unwilling to admit complexity. Bentham took the same position when he argued that asceticism was really based on the same pleasure-pain principles as his philosophy, but that the rules were reversed.<sup>14</sup> While he called pleasure a good, ascetics called it bad; he called pain evil, they called it good. Vivien, like Bentham, argues that good is the "natural" or the animal in man and evil is repression of the natural. She does not distinguish between animal and beast.

Another expression of determinism is the evolutionary optimism of Herbert Spencer. As nineteenth-century man is a biological improvement over the ape, so twenty-fifth-century man will be closer to "the crowning race," not only biologically but culturally, politically, morally, and economically. There may be the odd recession, a back-eddy in the stream, but on the whole improvement is inevitable. Tennyson himself has been accused of holding this position,<sup>15</sup> in spite of the early appearance of "Morte d'Arthur," and of the suggestion in the Idylls that man may reel back into the beast. In fact, Tennyson frequently expressed distress at the evils of the age, and portrayed the fall of Troy and Camelot as a direct result of man's moral irresponsibility. This irresponsibility is discussed in such poems as "Oenone," "Demeter and Persephone," and the dramas--not to speak of "Maud" and The Princess.

Perhaps a certain wistfulness in critics themselves has marred critical response to such poems as the Locksley Hall pair.



It is these which are usually referred to as evidence for Tennyson's optimism. Yet such an interpretation denies their dramatic quality. Because they are dramatic monologues every moral statement exists in a dual framework or perspective; each value judgment of the speaker is an expression of his moral limitations. The hero who soothes his injured ego by transferring his hopes for the future from the beautiful woman who has jilted him to the progress of man, only moments earlier has asserted that Amy well-deserves any mistreatment she will receive from the drunken brute who has succeeded him in her favour. Sixty years after the same man, now grown old and cynical, scorns the inferiority of his grandson's love and lover, as once he had scorned Amy and her lover. He then proceeds to belabour the age which has not lived up to his expectations of grandeur. Unable to associate himself with such an age, he withdraws, awaiting the "deathless angel in the tomb." He piously advises his grandson to love, as he now loves his dead enemy. Yet in his self-abandon he is unable to find good in any single institution of the present.

Determinism has its exponents in the field of religion as well as in science. These receive little better treatment from Tennyson. The speaker of "Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind" wishes desperately for absolute assurance that he is chosen of God. The life of an innocent, trusting child or a skipping lamb or ox seems to him highly desirable. But having begun to assert his own free will, he now cannot go back to the





world of Calvinistic predestination in which he was brought up. He complains: "The joy I had in my free-will [is] / All cold, and dead, and corpse-like grown." His mind is sensitive because it is responsive to the conflict in values. It is second-rate because it now desires a sign to justify abandonment of the independent search for truth. He desires the escape and consolation of determinism. He is unable either to accept the responsibilities of his freedom or to see that his dissatisfaction with determinism is valid. "Rizpah" tells the story of a member of an Evangelical sect who comes to a bereaved old woman preaching "Election, Election, and Reprobation," and arguing that her son's soul has been damned as a warning to the mother. Of course the ignorant but love-possessed mother utterly rejects both the doctrine and the very idea that her soul is of any value without that of her son. She counters the deterministic doctrines with scripture of her own choosing, such as "The first may be last . . . and the last may be first," and "Full of compassion and mercy, the Lord."

The voluntarist school, like the determinists, treated man in terms of natural process alone, susceptible to complete analysis by means of natural law. But whereas the determinists saw all opposition to these laws as foolhardy, the voluntarists felt that man could be manipulated as easily as other material elements. Once the best way or standard is established the rational mind is capable of achieving victory over those undesirable traits which have burdened man for centuries.



A paradoxical element in Positivist philosophy is that it contains both deterministic and voluntaristic elements. While man is the product of natural laws alone, laws which regulate his every act and motive, he is limited by religious and political institutions. These prevent him from fully responding to the urgings of nature. However, by means of education, by a rational perception of the "true" laws which govern man, it will be possible for the individual to throw off institutional evil and attain good. In other words, once man fully understands the direction in which he should go he is able to proceed unhindered. The steps in the movement from one pole to the other are clear. Once admitting that evil exists while at the same time accepting a deterministic position and identifying the natural with the good, the Positivists have to define evil as the unnatural, or that which is not within man. If the individual once identifies the good, he quite simply, therefore, moves toward it. There are no barriers to the "will" within the individual. Thus *Saint*-Simon and the Positivists provide arguments for the voluntarists. In 1832 Tennyson expressed his opposition to them.

The existence of the sect of the St. Simonists is at once a proof of the immense mass of evil that is extant in the nineteenth century, and a focus which gathers all its rays . . . . But I hope and trust that there are hearts as true and pure as steel in old England, that will never brook the sight of Baal in the sanctuary, and St. Simon in the Church of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

"Lucretius" is one of the clearest statements of the weakness of voluntarism. The Epicurean poet-scientist held that all things--even the gods--are composed of atoms, and that all



therefore could be dealt with in terms of natural law. If man understands these laws and his own nature he will be able to control the evil within him: his will exempts him from all the follies of the ignorant, passion-controlled crowd who cannot live according to the laws of nature only because they do not understand the nature of things. The erotic dreams produced by a potion given him by his jealous wife make him recoil in horror, forced to admit that he does not have control over his own will. "Twy-natured is no nature," he exclaims:

some unseen monster lays  
His vast and filthy hands upon my will,  
Wrenching it backward into his, and spoils  
My bliss in being. (277:219-222)

His "golden work," which was to have stated truths which could resolve the evil of the world and pluck "the mortal soul from out immortal hell," has failed. Aghast at man's helplessness before evil, he commits suicide.

The Princess is another expression of the error of voluntarism. Ida hopes to raise woman to her rightful place in the world by establishing a woman's college, in which women will be able to equal or outdo the intellectual accomplishments of men, thereby asserting their equality and destroying forever the evil of female subordination. She believes that evil can be destroyed simply by recognition of truth--the voluntarist's assertion. Her dreams are broken on the issue of passionate male-female love, to which she had attempted to make herself and her maidens impervious. The triumph of love enables her to face the possible collapse of her dreams of feminine emancipation and even of the Society itself. She watches:





a great black cloud  
 Drag inward from the deeps, a wall of night,  
 Blot out the slope of sea from verge to shore,  
 And suck the blinding splendor from the sand,  
 And quenching lake by lake and tarn by tarn  
 Expunge the world; so fared she gazing there,  
 So blacken'd all her world in secret, blank  
 And waste it seem'd and vain; till down she came,  
 And found fair peace once more among the sick. (156:21-29)

She goes the way of the Soul in "The Palace of Art," recognizing that evil lies within herself. Unlike Lucretius, she is now able to continue in the face of imminent disaster, for her vision is no longer limited by utopian ideas of reason's victory over evil. She is not dependent upon any dream of social progress. Voluntarism is negated by the passion of love in The Princess as it is by the passion of lust in "Lucretius."

Voluntarism also has its exponents in the religious world. They would establish absolutes in terms of moral laws, religious dogmas and statements of faith, then assert that these provide the solution to the world's evils, and that if society can be persuaded to accept them as the solution, victory is on the horizon. Failing the agreement of a whole society or segments of it, recognition of these absolutes by individuals will ensure their salvation. But the religious, as well as the "scientific," often over-estimate the strength of the will and fail to recognize the guile of man in adhering to the letter of the law but avoiding its spirit.

Tennyson's unwillingness to commit himself to doctrine or dogma, expressed by his disapproval of the thirty-nine articles,<sup>17</sup> distresses critics. Arthur Carr says:



If the circumstances of his breeding, his generation, and his temperament had made him a convert to Catholicism, socialism or theosophy, he might have written more interestingly to us. He might have been admired to the extent that he escaped the general malaise. But he kept to the general midstream of his culture.<sup>18</sup>

If the poet had obliged, we might be able to handle him with more facility. Whether his work could have retained its vitality is another matter.

Tennyson most vividly exposes the limitations of voluntarism in his dramatic monologues. Robert Langbaum has remarked that this mode, because it requires both sympathy and objectivity from the reader, is well-adapted for enabling the reader to judge specific moral positions:

Judgment is largely psychologized and historicized. We adopt a man's point of view and the point of view of his age in order to judge him--which makes the judgment relative, limited in applicability to the particular conditions of the case. This is the kind of judgment we get in the dramatic monologue, which is for this reason an appropriate form for . . . an age which has come to consider value as an evolving thing dependent upon the changing individual and social requirements of the historical process.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, Tennyson used, or to be more precise, developed a form which enabled him to explore the complexity of morality, of good and evil. The form is an excellent means of showing that all subjective expressions of moral law are relative to "the particular conditions of the case" and never fully satisfy that law. Each such expression is an indication of both freedom and finitude. Roy Basler agrees with Langbaum on Tennyson's awareness of the relativity of each moral act:

Tennyson examined with . . . penetration the essential relativity of all psychic phenomena, including the ethical concepts which his critics wish above all to keep absolute as divine revelation.



[He implies] that so long as man clings to an absolute ethic he is doomed to remain in a state of psychological barbarism.<sup>20</sup>

But Basler goes beyond Langbaum in asserting that for Tennyson an ethic may be relative and still be meaningful. Although man's every act is morally relative, it may be a valid expression of his innate urge to seek truth and do good.<sup>21</sup>

St. Simeon Stylites provides an example of the weakness of voluntarism, and of the deviousness of the mind in distorting truth to half-truth, then half believing its own distortion. He does indeed fulfill the law of self-abnegation, refusing to "glory in the flesh." But of course he sacrifices present delight only for future revel, a sacrifice made on the basis of prudence. He despises the herd below his pillar, believes himself worthy of sainthood, and presumes a remarkable familiarity with the wishes and opinions of God.

"St. Agnes Eve," "Sir Galahad," and "The May Queen" are similar examples of religious voluntarism. In each case tenets are enunciated which are laudable in the abstract, but in the particular situation only expose the moral limitations of the speaker. St. Agnes and Sir Galahad treat the laws of confession, humility, and aspiration toward righteousness not as truths about the human condition as much as rungs in the ladder of personal success. They subtly strive for ultimate well-being in heaven as the favoured of God, rather than for vulgar temporal power and wealth. Like St. Simeon they are quite egocentric. "The May





Queen," like "Maud," consists of three distinct monologues showing successive stages in the speaker's personality. The three sections portray progressive expressions of self-complacency. In the first the girl gloats over her glory as May Queen and in her triumph dismisses impatiently the claims of her lover:

And I ran by him without speaking, like a flash of light.  
 They call me cruel-hearted, but I care not what they say,  
 For I'm to be Queen o' the May, mother,  
     I'm to be Queen o' the May.  
 They say he's dying all for love, but that can never be;  
 They say his heart is breaking, mother--what is that to me?  
 There's many a bolder lad 'ill woo me any summer day.  
(48:17-23)

When New Year's Eve comes and she is ill, she reminisces about her past glory, indulges in self-pity over her imminent death and morbidly revels in anticipation of the grief of her family. In the Conclusion she eagerly anticipates her reception into heaven, blesses the clergyman who "taught me all the mercy, for he show'd me all the sin," and dismisses all sense of guilt with amazing alacrity. Like St. Simeon, St. Agnes and Sir Galahad she has found a means of persuading herself that her acceptance of absolute doctrines has raised her not only to righteousness but to the verge of sainthood. Voluntarism, whether scientific or religious, equates the discovery of a theory of salvation with the accomplishment of that salvation, quickly assuming that to will is to do.

Tennyson's idea of evil is monistic rather than dualistic. He does not believe that the natural world contains evil of itself



or that "the flesh" is evil. In a rejected stanza of In Memoriam he says:

Nature, so far as in her lies,  
Imitates God, and turns her face  
To every land beneath the skies,  
Counts nothing that she meets with, base,  
But lives and loves in every place.<sup>22</sup>

This statement seems in direct conflict with the well-known allusion to "Nature, red in tooth and claw" in Lyric LVI. In fact it is not contradiction. The latter phrase is part of a lengthy statement in which Tennyson says that although he had hoped that love was Creation's final law he must admit that there is an element of brutality which cannot be explained away. His conclusion is that it may be possible that God and Nature are not at strife, that they meet in light, but that the answer is "behind the veil." The matter is left in tension. The stanza which was omitted from the final edition is too confident to suit the tone of Lyric LVI. However, when he wrote the Prologue he brought up the matter again, suggesting that although the tension remains it is moderated by faith and a hope that one day mind and soul may make one music, that the tension will be resolved.

This is only one of many instances in which Tennyson speaks of the darkness or evil which seems to be an attribute of nature as due to man's limited perspective. One of the earliest appeared in 1839:

The light of this world is too full of refractions for men ever to see one another in their true positions. The world is better than it is called, but wrong and foolish. The whole framework seems wrong which in the end shall be found right.<sup>23</sup>



The image of "broken light" appears again in the Prologue. The quality of the faith is not that which dismisses "the grief and pain," but rather that which keeps a sensitive mind from the abyss of insanity. Lucretius, having, as he believes, eliminated the possibility of reality behind the veil, can only commit suicide when forced to recognize the horror.

The problem of the cruelty of nature and of the depressing implications of evolution for the future of the human race is also dealt with in The Princess. Ida responds to the idea that God and man are "as the workman and his work, / That practice betters," by placing the issue on a higher plane of non-time:

Let there be light and there was light; 't is so,  
For was, and is, and will be, are but is,  
And all creation is one act at once,  
The birth of light; but we that are not all,  
As parts, can see but parts, now this, now that,  
And live, perforce, from thought to thought, and make  
One act a phantom of succession. Thus  
Our weakness somehow shapes the shadow, Time. (133:306-313)

After all, pain is reaction, and apart from the phenomenon of succession cannot exist. Ida anticipates the explanation of In Memoriam and "The Ancient Sage." In the twentieth century T. S. Eliot says much the same thing in "Burnt Norton." At the still point of the turning world, where "time present and time past are both perhaps present in time future," is to be found release from action and suffering, release from the inner and outer compulsion, yet release surrounded by "a grace of sense, a white light still and moving." (The phrase "a grace of sense" suggests that the individual, although freed from evil in the presence of God,





may retain independent existence. The idea also appears in In Memoriam, XLVII).

By rejecting dualism Tennyson is forced down the road of private responsibility which the dualists can avoid. St. Simeon accuses "this home/ Of sin, my flesh, which I despise." Percival's sister, the nun, scrubs away at her heart with prayer and fasting until convinced she is pure, then longs for the Grail to come "and heal the world of all their wickedness" (402:94). She believes sin and evil exist apart from man and can be removed from him. She and her followers therefore despise the world and all that is in it. They are under the illusion that innocence is attainable, as are the May Queen, St. Agnes and Sir Galahad.

Tennyson does make several statements which could be interpreted as dualistic. One is a prose fragment summarizing the Zoroastrian explanation of the origin of good and evil.<sup>24</sup> The Almighty is said to have created freewill in two great spirits, Ormazd and Ahriman. The Lord then empowered the two to make the world, Ormazd to work pleasure and light, Ahriman, pain and darkness. However, the story as Tennyson paraphrases it is not a dualistic explanation of evil. Ormazd and Ahriman are not "irreducible elements" of good and evil. They are created by "the Lord" who clearly states that he has a reason for creating Ahriman. The tale has a surprising similarity to Christian myth of the origin of evil through Lucifer. Notably, evil is not within



the world itself, but within a personality. Man suffers the effects of another's wilful act. The idea appears again in the epilogue to "The Charge of the Heavy Brigade at Balaclava":

But since our mortal shadow, Ill,  
                     To waste this earth began--  
 Perchance from some abuse of Will  
                     In worlds before the man  
 Involving ours--he needs must fight  
                     To make true peace his own. (510)

As Tennyson explicitly stated both early and late in his life his belief that God is a Personality,<sup>25</sup> it is possible that he accepted the idea that evil originated in a divine personality such as Lucifer.

"Demeter and Persephone" lends further support to the possibility. Persephone, child of the Earth, comes under the influence of the Dark Lord of Hades when she strays from her family in pursuit of the Narcissus flower--an archetype of the self. Thereafter, in spite of her rescue by Hermes, son of Zeus, "the Life that had descended [to] re-arise," she was doomed to spend at least three months of the year with her Dark Lord. Persephone's suffering is a direct result of her own act. Moreover, her "Dark Lord" is not invincible. Once again, the parallel with the Christian myth explaining the mystery of good and evil in man is obvious.

Tennyson is more concerned with human agency in suffering and evil than with the brute forces of the natural world. The Troy of Oenone, Tiresias, Ulysses and Tithonus, like the Camelot



of Arthur and the Mount Ida of Demeter, is threatened by men, not nature. As the weakness in both determinism and voluntarism is their inadequate assessment of the complexity of the human will and their unwillingness to admit that "the mind has mountains," so the strength of Tennyson's analysis of evil is his insight into the possibilities and limitations of the will. In 1839 he wrote to Emily indicating the centrality of human freedom in his idea of evil:

"Why has God created souls knowing they would sin and suffer?" a question unanswerable. Man is greater than all animals because he is capable of moral good and evil . . . . God might have made me a beast; but He thought good to give me power, to set Good and Evil before me that I might shape my own path. The happiness, resulting from this power well exercised must in the end exceed the mere physical happiness of breathing, eating, and sleeping like an ox . . . . Yet what reasonable creature, if he could have been askt [sic] beforehand, would not have said, "Give me the metaphysical power; let me be the lord of my decisions; leave physical quietude and dull pleasure to lower lives." All souls methinks would have answered thus, and so had men suffered by their own choice, as now by the necessity of being born what they are.<sup>26</sup>

Yet Tennyson is not so naive as to believe that man can always recognize good and evil, let alone that when he can he is able to work good. Many factors, such as unconscious fear, mere insensitivity, natural lust for food, hunger and power, not to speak of intellectual incapacity, cast a shadow between the idea and the reality, limiting the will. Man has power on his own act, but he can "only half-control his doom," as the Locksley Hall hero says in one of his moments of insight.

M. Whitcomb Hess remarks:





What Tennyson hammered out through the irregularity of his superb verse-structures was the message he proclaimed throughout his life--the need of the human being to be freed from the "madhouse of Self."<sup>27</sup>

The hero of "Maud" discovers that the explanation of the world's woe is "each is at war with his kind." Man is a "weak race of venomous worms,/ That sting each other here in the dust" (212:46-47). Healing begins when the hero recognizes his own involvement in the plot, and cries: "Ah for a man to arise in me,/ That the man I am may cease to be" (205:396-397). His actions may be explained--but not excused--as in part the result of childhood influences. One of the most significant steps in his moral growth is the recognition that he is responsible for his actions and opinions, no matter how strong the external pressures. At one point he says in wonder:

So dark a mind within me dwells,  
                   And I make myself such evil cheer,  
 That if I be dear to some one else,  
                   Then some one else may have much to fear;  
 But if I be dear to some one else,  
                   Then I should be to myself more dear.  
 Shall I not take care of all that I think,  
 Yea, even of wretched meat and drink,  
 If I be dear,  
 If I be dear to some one else? (207:XV)

Vivien also toys with the conflict between determinism and free will. She argues that "the fire of heaven is not the flame of hell," that natural desires have no link with morality. To Mark she tries to pass off her opposition to Arthur as the result of her childhood environment, although in almost the same breath she lists her motives for attacking the Round Table: she hates.



Later she admits to Merlin that wounded vanity over her reputation as a whore motivates her. Tennyson leaves no doubt that the evil path she takes is a matter of choice.

Whatever the inner springs of evil in man the invariable expression of them is egoism. Man is at war with his kind. It is the toils of the ego that prevent him from responding to his innate perception of good, or distort his moral sensitivity. This is the theme of "Maud," which was originally to be titled "The Madness" (198). Significantly, it was Tennyson's favourite poem. In many ways it is like Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner." For the Mariner, too, redemption can only begin after he accepts responsibility for an egoistic deed done in casual unawareness of the holiness of all other created beings. Both poems trace the growth of a soul from isolation and self-worship to union in love and respect for other men.

The anguish of the human condition is heightened by the insuppressible power of man's Practical Reason (used in the Kantian and Coleridgean sense). Whatever his situation, man is able to imagine higher finite expressions of those absolutes without reference to which he never either knows or acts. The hero of "Maud" is always painfully aware of the gulf between the ideal and the real, heaven and earth. Moreover, he always retains his concept of human responsibility, knowing that man is often unconscious of his failing. Indeed, it is this concept of responsibility upon which hinges his return to sanity.<sup>28</sup> Only when he recognizes his own responsibility can he recover from paranoia and rejoin society.



G. K. Chesterton, commenting on Jekyll and Hyde, remarks on the ultimate inextricability of the evil in man. Man cannot be broken up into simple good and evil, he says,

because while evil does not care for good, good must care for evil. Or in other words, man cannot escape from God, because good is the God in man; and insists on omniscience.<sup>29</sup>

King Arthur's expression of the idea is: "Man's word is God in man." Perhaps the most adroit formulation of the dilemma is Merlin's. The riddling sage says to Gareth, who inquires about the weirdly-moving city and the enchanted qualities of its people, and who protests that such a thing is hard for "tillers of the soil,/ Who leaving share in furrow come to see/ The glories of our King" (315:238-240):

Yet take thou heed of [the King], for, so thou pass  
Beneath this archway, then wilt thou become  
A thrall to his enchantments, for the King  
Will bind thee by such vows as is a shame  
A man should not be bound by, yet the which  
No man can keep; but, so thou dread to swear,  
Pass not beneath this gateway, but abide  
Without, among the cattle of the field. (315:263-270)

To evade the issue is to be less than human. To accept it is to face process rather than completion, for the city is always building, never completed, and therefore never built at all.

The Red Knight and Tristram are indignant at the impossibility of such demands. Balin also fails to understand the predicament and trembles lest he fall. For he falsely believes that the vows are ultimate and realistic, that if ever broken, his existence will be finally negated. This very fear destroys him. But Camelot is no Utopia, no city of absolutes. It is a city





characterized by the painfulness of reality rather than the agony of illusion. When Tristram's harp jangles, Arthur's harp, a star set high in the sky, "makes a silent music up in heaven."

The outrageous vows of Arthur's order, denied, leave only the even more painful alternatives of voluntarism and determinism, which result in the suicide of Lucretius or the anarchy of Tristram. Herein lies the most powerful and the predominant source of tension in Tennyson's poetry.

Of the many situations in which the tension between Reason and Ego is avoided, the one most obvious and readily comprehensible is that in which specific moral values are openly admitted, but responsibility is not accepted. Therefore the will capitulates to evil. Such is the case of the Red Knight, who sends a challenge to Arthur:

Tell thou the King and all his liars that I  
Have founded my Round Table in the North,  
And whatsoever his own knights have sworn  
My knights have sworn the counter to it--and say  
My tower is full of harlots, like his court,  
But mine are worthier, seeing they profess  
To be none other than themselves--and say  
My knights are all adulterers like his own,  
But mine are truer, seeing they profess  
To be none other. (423:77-86)

The ease with which the intellect can be prostituted to the ego is ludicrous. Using a moral argument to justify immorality, the Red Knight holds up truth against the more comprehensive absolute of "good," saying that as it is not possible to be true to goodness, it is better to be true to the instincts--to be oneself. This is only a thinly-guised expression of determinism, an excuse for



uninhibited self-indulgence. This expression of evil is the most flagrantly anti-social, for it openly sets up self-interest as the ultimate motive. In order to continue to let self-indulgence reign, the freedom of others inevitably must be curtailed. When Tristram responds to the chiding of Isolt of Brittany about his desertion of her for Isolt of Ireland with "my soul, we love but while we may;/ And therefore is my love so large for thee,/ Seeing it is not bounded save by love," Isolt challenges him:

but say I loved  
This knightliest of all knights [Lancelot],  
and cast thee back  
Thine own small saw, "We love but while we may,"  
Well then, what answer?"  
He that while she spake,  
... had let one finger lightly touch  
The warm white apple of her throat, replied,  
"Press this a little closer, sweet, until--  
Come, I am hunger'd and half-anger'd--meat,  
Wine, wine--and I will love thee to the death,  
And out beyond into the dream to come." (433:705-715)

The phrase "I will love thee to the death" is twice ironic, for he would kill her if thwarted, and is himself cloven through the brain by Mark for his illegitimate love.

Much more sympathy is evoked by the hero such as Lancelot, who has taken the vows, remains to the end convinced that the struggle upward is essential, but by his very strengths--in this case his gentleness, sympathy and sensitivity to beauty--is betrayed into breaking them. Yet he is painfully conscious of guilt. He tries to ignore his conscience but is unsuccessful. He evokes sympathy because he is aware of the issues at stake,



of his own nature, of Arthur's greatness. He always faces the reality of his situation. Only Lancelot could say:

in me there dwells  
No greatness, save it be some far-off touch  
Of greatness to know well I am not great. (387:447-449)

His clear-sightedness prevents him at the last from lifting his hand against Arthur. He is therefore almost a tragic figure: he is not tragic because he willingly brings upon himself his own doom. One of the most poignant passages in the Idylls describes the effect of evil upon him:

The great and guilty love he bare the Queen,  
In battle with the love he bare his lord,  
Had marr'd his face, and mark'd it ere his time.  
Another sinning on such heights with one,  
The flower of all the west and all the world,  
Had been the sleeker for it; but in him  
His mood was often like a fiend, and rose  
And drove him into wastes and solitudes  
For agony, who was yet a living soul. (384:244-252)

Too acute to destroy his soul with faulty reasoning or open defiance of moral issues, Lancelot is driven to the verge of insanity. Although he does not fall back into the beast he instinctively seeks refuge in the wilds before at last fleeing to a monastery. His awareness is parallel to that of the hero of "Maud," who through love is brought to an intense understanding of his own limitations, and gains a sensitivity to other men. When in spite of himself Maud's lover strikes a blow in anger--a blow neither premeditated nor even in the strict sense of the word voluntary--he becomes insane, caught between the inexorable powers of his impulse to good and his impulse to evil.







While the conscious defier of moral value is pathetic and the conscious but regretful offender is almost tragic, the unconscious offender against moral values arouses deeper malaise. How is it possible to assign guilt or fair to visit judgment upon a man who knows not what he does? Yet this source of evil results in suffering at least as terrible as any other. Tennyson explores several cases of the unconscious offender. Here, too, the motivation is invariably egoism. The hero of "Maud" lives in an isolated world of fear and suspicion because of bitter childhood experiences, therefore buries himself in himself and curses an evil society. It is this fear and suspicion that are largely responsible for his instinctive retaliation when insulted by Maud's brother. Queen Mary permits the persecution and slaughter of Protestants partly under the conviction that she is the agent of God and the Church, partly under the violence of her fear lest she lose her lover, Philip. In each case it is the claims of the ego which unconsciously prompt antisocial action. Merlin's unsatisfied need for intimate affection provokes his response to Vivien, his "half belief" that she loved him. As a result he becomes lost "to life and use and name and fame." Just as surely as the action come the results of isolation, suffering on the part of actor and acted upon, and destruction of human life and creativity.

"Ulysses," "Tithonus," "The May Queen," and "The Sleeping Beauty" describe evils arising from blatant egoism. In each case



the evil is committed quite unwittingly. Ulysses and Tithonus eagerly seek self-realization through experience, Ulysses seeing experience as a path to fame, Tithonus, as a means of sensual titillation. Both consider themselves one with the gods, and look upon "the kindly race of men" as something from which they have been emancipated. Neither exhibits the least bit of sympathy for humanity. To Tithonus the music of Ilion a-building is a strange song. To Ulysses, also, experience is an end rather than a means. Similarly, the May Queen and the Sleeping Beauty--Lady Flora of "The Day Dream"--are

All too dearly self-involved  
 Yet [sleep] a dreamless sleep to [others],--  
 A sleep by kisses undissolved,  
 That lets [them] neither hear nor see. (99:261-264)

Like Gawain, they are too blind to have desire to see. Unaware, they shed poison wherever they go.

Tennyson's belief that egotism, a prime source of evil, can never be wholly overcome in an individual helps explain the difficult stanzas on war at the end of "Maud." The reader is told that the hero's decision to enlist is a sign that he has regained his sanity. Some critics interpret the passages as Tennyson's defence of war.<sup>30</sup> The interpretation has been adequately refuted by both James Mann in Maud Vindicated (1856) and Roy Basler. Tennyson himself clarifies his position in the epilogue to "The Charge of the Heavy Brigade." Moreover, we know that he recommended to his friends Henry Gardiner Adams' The Peace Reading-Book; Being a Series of Selections . . . Condemnatory



of the Principles and Practices of War (1844).<sup>31</sup> His argument is that in even the highest and purest deeds of man there is an element of egotism or pride, that "all work of man is/ Beauty with defect" (499:85-86). To dissociate oneself from war by withdrawal is as unrealistic and self-righteous as is the withdrawal from and condemnation of society by the hero of "Maud."

It is to live in a world of false absolutes. The task of the individual is to distinguish between a situation in which a blow is struck against "the public foe" and one in which "the red life [is] spilt for private woe." To avoid war is not at all to avoid the evil within man. Although he "who loves war for war's own sake/ Is fool, or crazed, or worse," man "needs must combat might with might,/ Or might would rule alone" (510).

Man is free to act creatively to work good rather than evil. But limited by the ego within, at every turn he distorts his impulse to good, even when most adequately expressing it. At the height of moral achievement he tends to view his perspective as ultimate, and thus worships ego once more. Therefore, even Arthur fails. He makes the mistake of putting his hope in the temporal glory of Camelot, forgets the obverse inscription on Excalibur in the oldest tongue of all this world, "Cast Me Away," and in self-pity says to Guinevere: "Thou has not made my life so sweet to me/ That I should greatly care to live" (440:448-449). He trusts Guinevere, "the fairest under heaven," Lancelot (to whom he says "thou dost not doubt me King"), and Merlin so wholly





that in spite of his keen vision he cannot see their sin. When Vivien mocks Arthur for winking at their crime Merlin replies that the King "wouldst against [his] own eye-witness fain/ Have all men true and leal, all women pure!" (378:791-792). Arthur himself tells Guinevere he was "too wholly true to dream untruth in thee" (441:538). When he realizes how sadly he has underestimated the force of human guile the shock is so great that a fog settles over him which does not lift until his dying moments. Only at the very last is he able to affirm to Bedivere that no human system or custom can hope to achieve the ideal or hope to avoid contamination, but that hope lies elsewhere.

In the fullness of her love for Gareth, Bellicent becomes selfish and would keep him with her. Her restrictions cause Gareth to lie to Merlin, then to say: "Let love be blamed for it, not she nor I" (316:293). On his first quest Gareth is unvanquished until he says in pride: "Methinks/ There rides no knight, not Lancelot, his great self,/ Hath force to quell me" (329:1152-1154); the next moment he lies unhorsed in the dust. Then he blames "mere unhappiness--/ Device and sorcery and unhappiness"--and his sword, the symbol of his faith! Until then Lynette had perversely attributed his victories to "sorcery or unhappiness or some device" (326:972-973,1032). The warnings throughout the Idylls against lust for fame are well made: Arthur cautions Gareth, Merlin lectures Vivien (320:557f; 373:458-517). Although the pride of Balin, Gareth and Arthur is less cruel than that



of St. Simeon, the May Queen, or Ulysses, it is nonetheless culpable.

Tennyson's view of evil underlies his stress upon action as a means of growth and a condition of vitality and sanity. Action is evil when it is motivated by the ego, when it is an attempt at self-preservation by a blow against other egos, or when it is withdrawal to avoid danger. Under such motivation, frustration and sterility are the ultimate results. When the hero of "Maud" at one point withdraws into the forest to escape evil and at another strikes Maud's brother to defend his honour, he errs. However, the Prince goes into a weird seizure (when confronted by Ida's refusal to love) because he sees truly. When Arthur strikes at Mark, at King Pellam and at the Red Knight, he is striking at evil in defense of the good. Great responsibility falls upon the individual to maintain his integrity in his motives. The naive, unable to face the challenge, would respond by speaking of good and evil in terms of actions rather than of motives, of absolutes rather than of relativity. Arthur quite rightly allows Geraint to retire to his kingdom, ostensibly to cleanse it from evil, but actually as an escape from evil. For Arthur knows that at this point he is unable to legislate for Geraint. The action of Maud's lover (in Parts I and II) and of Geraint are unwittingly self-destructive. The action of the Prince and of Arthur effect self-realization.

If ego is the prime source of evil, how is evil to be counteracted? The negation of the egoistic self is love, or in



Shelley's terms, imaginative self-identification with another ego. Because both Hallam and Tennyson read and admired Shelley,<sup>32</sup> it is worthwhile to compare parallel passages from Hallam and Shelley and to speculate on their influence upon Tennyson. Shelley writes:

The great secret of morals is love, or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person not our own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own.<sup>33</sup>

The similar passage in Hallam is:

Love, by which I mean direct, immediate, absorbing affection for one object, on the ground of similarity perceived, and with a view to more complete union, as it is the noblest quality of the human soul, must represent the noblest affection of the Divine Nature. And here the words of St. John meet us, "God is love."<sup>34</sup>

Love is prevented from becoming a mere panacea, vague, illusory and bland, by the insistence on particularity and intensity.

Here Tennyson's valuing of finite action and his relativity begin.

Good can only be realized as a particular finite expression of one man's vision of an absolute. Love can only be expressed in

particular acts. This is why Tennyson says: "The Godlike life is with man and for man;"<sup>35</sup> "For merit lives from man to man/

And not, O Lord, from man to thee" (163:Prologue), and "I will not shut me from my kind," . . . lest I stiffen into stone" (191:CVIII).

The most incriminating thing Percival could say is: "All men, to one so bound by such a vow [to follow the Grail]/ And women are as phantoms" (408:564-565).

Spedding puts his finger on the crucial point in his





review of "The Two Voices," defending the conclusion of the poem:

Unhappily all moral reasoning must ultimately rest on the internal evidence of the moral sense; and where this is disordered, the most unquestionable logic can conclude nothing, because it is the first principles which are at issue; the major is not admitted. Mr. Tennyson's treatment of the issue is more scientific.<sup>36</sup>

The soul, in a dialogue with itself, has no ultimate basis upon which to form moral judgments, cannot come to grips with good and evil. Morality cannot exist in a vacuum. For the same reason Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* cannot realize forgiveness and reconciliation until he spontaneously blesses the watersnakes and joins with a congregation in "the worship which is love." The death-dance with which In Memoriam begins must give way to a bridal feast; the suicide urge, to "I will not shut me from my kind." When the Lotus-Eaters retire from the war with evil, no longer willing to be "ever climbing up the climbing wave" they find each others' voices thin as voices from the grave. Sitting down "upon the yellow sand between the sun and the moon on the shore," they lie "like Gods together, careless of mankind." Their ease leads into sleep, hardly to be distinguished from death. When increasing pessimism about the final outcome of the struggle--about the nature of the absolute in terms of which they act--supplants the absorption in the struggle, they, like Merlin, are vulnerable to attack. In their pessimism they are egocentric, as are all of Tennyson's villains. Having achieved some slight victory by looking beyond to an ideal, in pride they conceive themselves as having achieved the ideal; relativism gives way to absolutism. Then, suddenly aware of their finiteness, they despair.



The only effective alternative to egoistic pride is love. Therefore it is not surprising that the predominant subject in Tennyson's poetry is romantic love. He uses tension between man and woman to contrast the results of love (increased freedom, strengthened will, fruitful action) and of egoism (bondage, weakened will, stagnation). The Idylls has been dismissed as a sordid roll-call of adulterous affairs.<sup>37</sup> But a comparison of the Gareth-Lynette and Geraint-Enid idylls will show that the poem is more concerned with the effect of their own love-life upon individuals than with sensationalism. Both Arthur and Tristram urge freedom in love. The difference in the freedom of each results from different concepts of love. Tristram's love is selfish and cruel. Arthur's is selfless, and merciful beyond belief. When Lancelot defends his rejection of Elaine with "free love will not be bound" Arthur returns: "Free love, so bound, were freest, . . . / Let love be free; free love is for the best" (400:1368-1370). Tristram sings: "New loves are sweet as those that went before, / Free love--free field--we love but while we may" (426:280-281). The contradiction is resolved by testing the results of each kind of love. Arthur explains that he stresses faithfulness in love because there is

no more subtle master under heaven  
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,  
Not only to keep down the base in man,  
But teach high thought, and amiable words  
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,  
And love of truth, and all that makes a man. (440:475-480)

Whereas the love of Gareth and of Arthur results in freedom, will



to action, creative deeds, and "socialization," the egocentric love of Tristram, Vivien, and the Red Knight leads to slavery, isolation, death and chaos.

Similarly, "Maud" is the record of a man raised by love from egoism and insanity to selflessness and reconciliation with the dark world. He gains a perspective which allows him to move out of his forest den, to be reconciled with death (the ultimate denial of the ego), to differentiate between evil doer and evil deed, to commune with other men and to make a positive contribution to the society in which he finds himself. He is powerless to overcome his ego and the effects of his early environment until he sees beauty, is loved, and returns that love. Then his will is vitalized and he is freed from his ego.

The effect of love upon the will is a major element in the process of victory over evil. Having killed Maud's brother involuntarily, her lover is driven insane by the enforced separation from Maud and by the realization of his own depravity. His will is so enervated that he imagines himself in the grave. When he stands on a foreign shore, he muses on a sea-shell and on his own state:

See what a lovely shell,  
 Small and pure as a pearl,  
 Lying so close to my fist,  
 Frail but a work divine,  
 Made so fairily well  
 With delicate spire and whorl,  
 How exquisitely minute,  
 A miracle of design!

. . . . .





The tiny cell is forlorn  
 Void of the little living will  
 That made it stir on the shore. (213:49-56,61-63)

He, like the shell, has a house built by the gods, as the Ancient Sage would say, "so beautiful, so vast, so various, so beyond/  
 All work of man, yet, like all work of man,/ A beauty with defect."  
 His defect is the shell's defect: both are "void of the little living will." He struggles back to light and sanity, regaining his will, by means of her love:

For years, a measureless ill,  
 For years, for ever, to part--  
 But she, she would love me still;  
 And as long, O God, as she  
 Have a grain of love for me,  
 So long, no doubt, no doubt,  
 Shall I nurse in my dark heart,  
 However weary, a spark of will  
 Not to be trampled out. (213:97-105)

The very heart of the process by which the egoistic self is raised to a height from which its perspective is enlarged and its vision sharpened to include other beings than itself is described in the next lines:

Strange, that the mind, when fraught  
 With a passion so intense  
 One would think that it well  
 Might drown all life in the eye,--  
 That it should by being so overwrought,  
 Suddenly strike on a sharper sense  
 For a shell, or a flower, little things  
 Which else would have been past by! (213:106-113)

Suddenly he sees beauty in a world formerly dark. Because "the darkness is in man," when the man is transformed the darkness lifts. Coleridge's Ancient Mariner also discovered that "all things great and small" are beautiful.



The power of love to vitalize the will and motivate creative deeds is also felt by the King. He cries to himself:

What happiness to reign a lonely king,  
 Vext--O ye stars that shudder over me,  
 Vext with waste dreams? for saving I be join'd  
 To her that is the fairest under heaven,  
 I seem as nothing in the mighty world,  
 And cannot will my will nor work my work  
 Wholly, nor make myself in mine own realm  
 Victor and Lord. But were I join'd with her,  
 Then might we live together as one life,  
 And reigning with one will in everything  
 Have power on this dark land to lighten it,  
 And power on this dark world to make it live. (305:81-93)

It is his love for Guinevere that enables him to see other than waste dreams. His increased power to act is directly linked to his improved vision:

Thereafter--as he speaks who tells the tale--  
 When Arthur reach'd a field of battle bright  
 With pitch'd pavilions of his foe, the world  
 Was all so clear about him that he saw  
 The smallest rock far on the faintest hill,  
 And even in high day the morning star. (306:94-99)

This is the same acuity of vision that enables the lover of Maud to see the sea-shell. In contrast, Vivien has "vague" vision (364:458). But once Arthur loses Guinevere, and is no longer able to touch her lips or her hands, knowing that they belong to Lancelot, his vision is obscured. A fog falls on the last battle, one so deep that friend slays friend not knowing. Preparing for the battle, Arthur says to Sir Bedivere:

Yet let us hence, and find or feel a way  
 Thro' this blind haze which, ever since I saw  
 One lying in the dust at Almesbury,  
 Hath folded in the passes of the world. (444:75-78)



Similarly, the love of Gareth for Lynette enables him to overcome all the trials along the way and to overthrow all his foes. But when Geraint loses his trust in Enid he forsakes his vows, rushes off into the wilds with her and there is unable to see the many threats that endanger them while she, remaining firm in her love, can see them. He is inevitably overthrown by Earl Limours. Not until he hears Enid shriek in agony and his love is awakened, in spite of himself, is he able to leap up and in one blow sever the head of Earl Doorm.

The theme of "The Daydream" is "And evermore a costly Kiss/ The prelude to some brighter world" (99:251-252). The poem is a comment on the relationship between love and fruitful action. While the princess sleeps "a sleep by kisses undissolved" the whole palace remains in a state of suspended animation, one in which only weeds grow. But the fairy prince with "the Magic Muse in his heart" discovered that "love in sequel works with fate,/ And draws the veil from hidden worth." Suddenly:

A TOUCH, a kiss! the charm was snapt.  
 There rose a noise of striking clocks,  
 And feet that ran, and doors that clapt,  
 And barking dogs, and crowing cocks;  
 A fuller light illumined all,  
 A breeze thro' all the garden swept,  
 A sudden hubbub shook the hall,  
 And sixty feet the fountain leapt.  
 . . . . .  
 The palace bang'd and buzz'd and clackt,  
 And all the long-pent stream of life  
 Dash'd downward in a cataract. (97:133-140,146-148)

It is the positive effect of love on both lover and loved, and its contribution to the growth in perception and strengthening





of the will that enables the poet to echo throughout In Memoriam

"Better to have loved and lost/ Than never to have loved at all."

So also can he say in "Love and Duty," which was undoubtedly

written when he was forced to break off his engagement to

Emily:

Of love that never found his earthly close,  
What sequel? Streaming eyes and breaking hearts?  
Or all the same as if he had not been?  
Not so. . . .

. . . . .  
. . . Am I not the nobler thro' thy love?  
O, three times less unworthy! likewise thou  
Art more thro' Love. (85:1-4, 86:19-21)

This is the ultimate answer to Lancelot and Guinevere.

At this point the explanation of Tennyson's distrust of  
Carlyle's doctrine of work is clear. Carlyle sees work as a  
means of growth:

For there is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness,  
in Work. . . . The real desire to get Work done will itself lead  
one more and more to truth . . . . The latest Gospel in the  
world is know thy work and do it . . . . Destiny, on the whole,  
has no other way of cultivating us . . . . Blessed  
is he who has found his work; let him ask no other blessedness.<sup>38</sup>

Tennyson argues that without love as a source of energy all man's  
work will be directed to the strengthening of the ego as it is  
in the case of Edyrn, "the Sparrowhawk." Isolation, sterility  
and ultimately inactivity will result. Man, like the hero of  
"Maud," will "hide himself in himself."

There are several indications that Tennyson sees in the  
Incarnation the epitome of the process of love. Man is capable  
of love because of his "Reason"--an innate moral capacity. Love  
is characterized by freely willed non-egoistic acts. The key  
concepts are Reason, love, will and deed. At various times



Tennyson speaks of Christ as the complete expression of each. In a notebook jotting he links Christ and the idea of Reason:

"used for 'learned' λόγος (in St. John) the word of reason."<sup>39</sup>

The reference is probably to the opening passage of John's gospel:

ἐν ἀρχῇ ὁ λόγος . . . , (In the beginning was the Word and the

Word was with God, and the Word was God), generally interpreted

as describing Christ. The jotting is rather cryptic, but it seems

to suggest that "λόγος," the noun used for Christ, is also used

to indicate "learned", or the product of Reason. As man's

moral capacity is an aspect of the divine, so Christ is the em-

bodiment of the moral capacity, or of Reason. In a second

notebook jotting Tennyson expands on the idea:

O Everlasting God and thou not less  
 The Everlasting Man (since that Great Spirit  
 Who permeated and informs thine inward sense  
 Though limited in action, capable  
 Of the extreme of knowledge, whether join'd  
 Unto thee in conception or confin'd  
 From former wanderings in other shapes  
 I know not, deathless as it's [sic] God's own life  
 Burns on with inextinguishable strength)  
 O Lords<sup>40</sup>

This passage seems to be the beginning of an invocation to Christ.

Both jottings are from the pre-Cambridge days (about 1824) and

probably were written before Tennyson came under the influence of

Kant and Coleridge. Perhaps this is why he does not distinguish

between knowledge and wisdom, "pure" and "practical" reason.

The latter passage expresses the same idea as In Memoriam:

Tho' truths in manhood darkly join,  
 Deep-seated in our mystic frame,  
 We yield all blessing to the name  
 Of Him that made them current coin;



For Wisdom dealt with mortal powers,  
     Where truth in closest words shall fail,  
     When truth embodied in a tale  
 Shall enter in at lowly doors.

And so the Word had breath, and wrought  
     With human hands the creed of creeds  
     In loveliness of perfect deeds,  
 More strong than all poetic thought. (172:XXXVI).

Christ is the expression, the "word" of "truths deep-seated in our mystic frame." The evidence is his life of "perfect deeds." All other characters in Tennyson's poetry--even Arthur--find their "high purpose broken by the worm" (369:194). Tennyson looks upon Christ, "the Life indeed" (171:XXXII), as the antithesis of ego, the sufficient positive force in the "world-war of dying flesh against the life" (369:191). When the knights struggle back from the Grail quest with tales of deserts and madness, storms and failure, Arthur tells them that only when the king is obedient to his vows to follow the Christ, plowing his allotted field, do true visions come,

In moments when he feels he cannot die,  
 And knows himself no vision to himself,  
 Nor the high God a vision, nor that One  
 Who rose again. (413:912-915)

This "immortal love" is the ultimate counter to the "Death in all life and lying in all Love" (369-192). Apart from it, even the most magnificent ego is doomed. Even Merlin, builder of Camelot and symbol of the capability of the human mind, was lost when he "sat in his own chair" and "walk'd with dreams and darkness."





The same link between human and divine is expressed in the frequent reappearance of the phrase "Man's word is God in man" in the Idylls. Arthur "honors his own word/ As if it were his God's" (382:143-144), and urges his knights to do the same. That is, man's deed must fulfil his word, his acts express his moral insight. The stress Arthur lays on purity of deed completes the link between Reason, word and deed.

The opening line of In Memoriam--"Strong Son of God, immortal Love,"--establishes Tennyson's view that the Incarnation is the epitome of love. In the final lyric the form of address is changed to "O living will that shalt endure . . .,/ Flow through our deeds and make them pure." Christ, who is immortal Love and also the "living will," is a doer of perfect deeds. In him the otherwise flawed deeds of the poet and of King Arthur (449:412-413) are purified.

The role of the Incarnation in Tennyson's view of evil, together with its importance in his epistemology, explain the frequency of the allusions to it in the poetry. Troy and Camelot are the archetypal cities in Tennyson's work, the ideal civilizations toward which man strives. They are one and the same in essence; in time, Camelot is the post-Incarnation Troy. Each is built to music, each is favoured of the gods, each is an eternal city. However, each is threatened when its inhabitants deny the divine aspect of human experience. Tiresias explains that Troy is doomed because Cadmus killed the dragon guarding the



source of the river Dirce. Dragon and water are traditional symbols of Christ and of life, respectively. Here Tennyson refers to the tradition that the dragon is "the God's own son." He probably has in mind the Old Testament story of Moses lifting a brass serpent up on a pole as a source of healing from the plague of poisonous serpents inflicted upon the rebellious Israelites. It was this passage to which Christ referred in John 3:14, saying that he likewise must be put upon a tree. The dragon was one of the symbols carved over the gateway of Camelot and carved into the chairs of Merlin and Arthur. It was also one of the signs of Arthur, who was himself a Christ-figure to the knights. The sacred fish, also a symbol of Christ, floats over the breast of the Lady of the Lake as she stands on the keystone of Camelot, drops of water falling from either hand. For the early Christian church the fish became used as a declaration of faith in Christ because of the acrostic formed by the letters of the Greek word for fish, Ἰχθύς, and the initial letters of the phrase Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Θεοῦ υἱὸς σωτήρ, which is translated as Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour. Camelot falls when the knights forsake their vows to follow Arthur, who follows the Christ. Finally, Troy, like Camelot, will flourish only if "the High God behold it from beyond,/ And enter it, and make it beautiful" (443:16-17).



## SUMMARY

The majority of Tennyson's poems explore the various expressions of evil within human personality. Tennyson takes a monistic position: evil lies within man and can never be wholly eradicated. He disagrees with two common attitudes toward evil: determinism and voluntarism. Determinists generally assert that man has no free will, that he is ruled by natural forces. Some determinists, such as Vivien, argue that all man's natural instincts--particularly the sexual instinct--are good, and should not be limited by institutions or beliefs which thwart nature. Voluntarists believe that man's will is entirely free, and that if he only sees good he will be able to achieve it. Tennyson believes that the human will is partially free. Man cannot always achieve the good he sees.

The problem of evil is complicated because man often deliberately chooses to do evil rather than good. At other times he wishes he could do good but has not sufficient determination. Worst of all, he often cannot even recognize the difference between good and evil, so does evil unwittingly. The chief cause of evil, however it is expressed within the individual, is the human ego, which would protect itself even at the cost of destroying other egos. Human selfishness is so great and so subtle that it expresses itself in the most moral of acts. The inevitable result is isolation of the individual, loss of freedom, and weakening of the will.





Love, which Tennyson defines as imaginative self-identification with another human, is the only antidote for evil. It can only be expressed in particular finite moral acts. The effects of love on a human personality are union with other men, increased freedom, and strengthened will. Tennyson believed that the Incarnation is the epitome of love. At various times he described Christ as immortal love, the living will and the doer of perfect deeds. Therefore it is not surprising that so many references to the Incarnation appear in his work. He portrays Troy and Camelot, archetypes of the eternal city, the ideal human civilization, as rising or falling according to their inhabitants' responses to the Incarnation.



### III

#### THE IDEA OF HISTORY: AN IRON TRUTH

Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.  
"Morte d'Arthur"

The sunniest glow of life dwells in that soul,  
chequered duly with dark streaks from night and history.  
Carlyle on Tennyson<sup>1</sup>

In recent years various conflicting statements have been made about Tennyson's idea of history. He has been called a pessimist<sup>2</sup> and an evolutionary optimist,<sup>3</sup> an adherent to the cyclical view of history,<sup>4</sup> and an escapist who flees from the painful realities of human life to some narcotic dream of Nirvana.<sup>5</sup> In fact, Tennyson explicitly denied each of these positions.

Any discussion of his idea of history must be set against the back-drop of the general optimism that history was pushing man toward a state of intellectual and moral perfection in which the ills of the past would no more haunt him. This general feeling was contributed to by several schools of thought. Spencer made sociological adaptations of biological theories of evolution to convince himself that man was evolving morally by a process of natural selection; Mill laid the tribute for progress at the feet of utilitarian principles; Marx had faith in economics; Comte, in the rational mind's ability to overthrow the superstition of religion and metaphysics; Hegel, in the emergence of a divine will; and Burke, in the providence of God. The optimism that was thus generated still has a winsome attraction for the twentieth century. Evidence of this may be found in the movement led by Teilhard de Chardin with his theories of hominization and of the cephalization stage



The dominant note in modern culture is not so much confidence in reason as faith in history. The conception of a redemptive history informs the most diverse forms of modern culture. . . . Though there are minor dissonances, the whole chorus of modern culture learned to sing the new song of hope in remarkable harmony. The redemption of mankind, by whatever means, was assured for the future. It was, in fact, assured by the future.<sup>7</sup>

It cannot be said too forcefully that Tennyson had no such faith in history, neither early nor late in his life. True, he was impressed by the potential of technology for improvement of the conditions of human life. He scanned the preceding centuries and found the contrast with his own age immense. Of course he hoped that commerce would link the nations with chains of gold (while no doubt aware of the irony in the figure), that a Federation of the World would ensure peace in the great "secular to-be." Yet for every assertion of hope in his poetry is a counter-assertion; he hears the Voice of the Earth wailing: "I clash with an Iron Truth/ When I make for an age of gold" (827). In the mid-twentieth century after a second world war following hard upon the heels of the first, which was to be the war to end all wars, and while brush-fire wars rage on every continent, the iron truth is a little more obvious than it was to Herbert Spencer. In Millennium and Utopia Ernest Lee Tuveson speaks of the dilemma of modern man: "The confidence in History has been an essential prop to the psyche, and its crumbling has left a void which must be filled if the present generation is to recover its hope and courage."<sup>8</sup> One of the most vivid and horrifying pictorial representations of the crumbling appears on the cover illustration of Palmer's Dictionary of Modern History. The immediate focus of attention is a French executioner





in the act of releasing the guillotine blade to fall upon the neck of a bound victim. A basket of corpses and heads fills the foreground. Yet the shock is miniscule compared to the effect of what at first the eye has neglected because of its relative lack of detail--a mushroom cloud. Tennyson's inability to muster faith in history could be called "modern," but perhaps a more accurate term would be "realistic."

The extraordinary degree of his sensitivity to human anguish demanded that he have a source of hope and courage. Even when he was young, and when apart from Hallam's death his life was relatively free from suffering, he demanded a source of hope. How much more so when, as he grew older, he became increasingly conscious of physical and mental suffering on all quarters. The idea of immortality provided the succour he needed. This must be the first and largest consideration in any attempt to discover his view of history. The quality of the poet's optimism, the extent of his faith in progress, and the nature of his political opinions are all influenced by his idea of immortality.

Tennyson's insistence that the idea of personal immortality is a major factor in any coherent and satisfactory world view is more than a little embarrassing. The extent of the embarrassment is indicated by the general reluctance among critics to deal with the issue.<sup>9</sup> If Tennyson's hope for immortality is rooted in the shallow ground of distaste with the present, of revulsion at the grossness of the empiricist theories informing the laissez faire



idea of morality, or even, as was the case with Kant, in his belief that "goodness" should be made to pay off later because it obviously does not pay off sooner, then indeed our embarrassment at the fondness of his hopes is warranted. However, if, as evidence indicates, his idea of immortality is a corollary of his epistemology and his idea of evil, if it is an inescapable conclusion of his conviction that there is "a paradise within greater far" than the Earthly Paradise, then to ignore that idea will be to misunderstand and misrepresent a major element of his vision.

Tennyson's epistemology leads logically to the idea of immortality as a state in which individuals exist as distinct, conscious entities. For if time and space are partial representations of reality, are dimensions which can be transcended by men in history, then non-time is not the denial of the perceiving man but the removal of the limitations of time, the "phantom of succession" by which man "shapes the shadow." "My own dim life should teach me this," he says, "That life shall live for evermore" (171:XXXIV).

If man is able to use time as a tool for the heightening of his consciousness, as the poet says to Lady Clara Vere de Vere (47), then he is not altogether its slave. Tennyson's belief that the powers of time and space are limited makes ridiculous any claim that the extent of his hopes for the future is within the scope of history alone.



Numerous passages indicate that he did not conceive of immortality as a merging with a Platonic World-Soul. The distastefulness of the idea is recorded in In Memoriam:

That each, who seems a separate whole,  
Should move his rounds, and fusing all  
The skirts of self again, should fall  
Remerging in the general Soul,

Is faith as vague as all unsweet.  
Eternal form shall still divide  
The eternal soul from all beside;  
And I shall know him when we meet. (174:XLVII)

Such a concept is the antithesis to his belief that human life is a process of growth. Lyric XLV speaks of the one certain value of life as the beginning and increasing of self-consciousness. A chief characteristic of Hallam was his growth "from high to higher,/ As mounts the heavenward altar-fire,/ As flies the lighter thro' the gross" (173:XLI). So, after death he is "unto vaster motions bound,/ The circuits of [his] orbit round/ A higher height, a deeper deep" (177:LXIII). Immortality is a condition in which "From state to state the spirit walks," leaving behind the corpse, "the shatter'd stalks or ruined chrysalis" (181:LXXXII).

Tennyson's belief in personal immortality, although most clearly stated in the elegy, also appears in the poems of the middle years, after the emotional stress of Hallam's death, of the enforced postponement of his marriage, and of his financial crisis. In these years, when he was at the height of his happiness, with the positive psychological benefits of having a young family, of knowing that he was producing good and well-recognized work, and of earning an income sufficient not only to keep the family but also to afford the luxury





of travel, it is less probable that his statements about immortality were motivated by escapism.

Among the many references to immortality at this time is his argument with Carlyle, who did not believe that death brings anything more than dust.<sup>10</sup> In 1852 Tennyson speaks of the dead Duke of Wellington as "a spirit among things divine" (224:139), one who has toiled "thro' the long gorge to the far light" and now, "far advanced in state," is engaged in "other nobler work" (225:213; 226:275,257). When Gareth splits open the helm of the most fearsome of all knights, Death, "out from this/ Issued the bright face of a blooming boy/ Fresh as a flower new-born" (332:1372-74). In "De Profundis" he describes his child as "unconceivably thyself" and able to "choose; and still depart/ From death to death thro' life and life, and find/ Nearer and ever nearer Him" (484).

Two aspects of Tennyson's idea of immortality are of particular significance. First, immortality is characterized by continued growth. In the brief poem "Wages" he says:

The wages of sin is death: if the wages of Virtue be dust,  
     Would she have the heart to endure for the life  
                                     of the worm and the fly?  
 She desires no isles of the blest, no quiet seats of the just,  
     To rest in a golden grove, or to bask in a summer sky;  
 Give her the wages of going on, and not to die. (273)

Here the relationship (discussed in Chapter Two) between love, freedom and action, which together effect heightened consciousness, is reinforced. The concept is quite opposite to the neo-Platonic idea of immortality. It bears resemblance to the ideas expressed by C. S. Lewis in his fantasy The Great Divorce.<sup>11</sup> Second, immortality is usually represented by light and fire. Tennyson dreams of



Hallam, "thrice as large as man," standing on a great ship with shining sides which disappears into a crimson cloud (189:CIII). The wounded King Arthur is laid on a barge lighted by "the long glories of the winter moon," which bears him away till both "vanish into light" (448:360;450:468). The Ancient Sage speaks of immortality as "the high-heaven dawn of more than mortal day." Light is one of the most predominant images in his work, and is often spoken of in contrast to "the shadow" of man's limited ability to grasp reality. On the other hand, like Blake in "Little Black Boy" he implies that man's weakness needs protection by means of the shadow from the strength of the light. Exposure must be gradual to prevent harm. So he says in In Memoriam, "But help thy foolish ones to bear;/ Help thy vain worlds to bear thy light" (163:Prologue). The idea that Truth is dangerous is traditional. Tennyson may have been impressed by Coleridge's treatment of it, and by his conclusion that truth must often be cloaked in symbol (or shadow) to prevent it from destroying.<sup>12</sup> The same issue was dealt with and similar arguments used by Mark Pattison in his paper "Double Truth," presented to the Metaphysical Society, February 12, 1878. This was one of the few meetings Tennyson attended.

Two more related incidents point out the importance of the theme of growth towards light and heightened consciousness. The first is his composition of "Epitaph on Caxton." The poem is based upon Caxton's motto, Fiat Lux (Let there be light), and begins: "Thy prayer was 'Light--more Light--while Time shall last!'" (515). In an early version of the poem appear alternate possibilities for



the last line of the quatrain: "Shine on us, Lord of all, till all be light," and "More light, more light, O God, till all be light."<sup>13</sup> These lines, together with Tennyson's reply when asked what his greatest single desire was--"A clearer vision of God"<sup>14</sup>--reinforce the probability that he conceived immortality as a state in which the conscious individual spirit moves steadily toward truth, or God. The aspect of self-consciousness is reinforced by the phrase "face to face" of "Crossing the Bar," together with his statement to Jowett that he thought of God as personality because the highest truths imaginable by man exist as characteristics of personality.<sup>15</sup>

Because Tennyson found such a firm base for hope in the idea of personal immortality, he could afford to be a little more realistic and hard-headed about the possibilities of technology and cultural evolution as redeemers of man and society. He could admit the possibility that science may enslave its present masters or that Camelot may reel back into the beast without taking the grim alternatives of absurdism or suicide.

The evidence that in his later years he was well aware of the threat of society's collapse is plentiful enough, and in fact seldom debated. After all, Camelot is destroyed. In the epilogue of the Idylls he speaks quite clearly of the possibility that England will fall, and of a last battle "Where all of high and holy dies away" (451:66). A fragment of an unpublished verse of his poem to Fitzgerald at the end of "Tiresias" provides even more evidence:

Ah, if I  
Should play Tiresias to the times  
I fear I might but prophesy  
Of faded faiths, & civic crimes











picture of destruction. In this case cathedrals, kings, saints and founders are swept "to the waste deeps together" (255:231).

Strangely enough, in the midst of all the strife and destruction the dreamer hears a controlling music, and realizes the "wildest wailings [are] never out of tune/ With that sweet note" (255:224-225). In 1830 he was admired by the Harvard Transcendentalists, a group which would never commend a temporalist.<sup>17</sup>

It is interesting to contrast the claims made by recent critics that Tennyson's pessimism increased as he grew older with standard earlier critical responses to the effect that he was "black-blooded," a melancholy, gloomy, withdrawn figure during his youth and a superficial flatterer of his age after the success of In Memoriam. Perhaps to speak of his optimism or pessimism only in terms of the prospects of civilization and of England in particular is to start down a dead-end road. If we begin by remarking that his idea of evil--which must be the basis for any general tone of optimism or pessimism--is neither deterministic nor dualistic, we will have a better opportunity for assessing the quality of his optimism.

If Tennyson did believe that, as Enid sings, "man is man [which is to say, not beast] and master of his fate" (337:355), then it would be possible for him to have an optimism quite independent of the whirl of event and circumstance. Such an optimism would not be at odds with the poet's awareness of suffering and anguish, or of Troy in flames. Surely this is the quality of optimism referred to by Carlyle when he said: "The sunniest glow of life dwells in that



soul, chequered duly with dark streaks from night and history."<sup>18</sup>

"The Poet's Song" (1842), written while the "black-blooded" young man was in the most unhappy of situations, succinctly expresses the pervasive mood of his work. After a rain the poet leaves the town and goes to where "a light wind blew from the gates of the sun" (115). The sun probably symbolizes truth and God here as it does elsewhere in the poetry. It is this same wind which sends waves of shadow over the wheat; Similarly, in "The Ancient Sage": "The clouds themselves are children of the Sun . . . . And Day and Night are children of the Sun" (501:242,245). The song the poet then sings is one which causes bird and beast of prey to stand staring, and the nightingale to think:

I have sung many songs,  
But never a one so gay,  
For he sings of what the world will be  
When the years have died away. (115)

This is the music which overrides the destruction seen by the clerk's wife in "Sea-Dreams," the music to which the towers of Troy and Camelot are built, and which welcomes Arthur into the island-valley of Avilion. The crash of the walls of Camelot is a calamity, yet to the extent that the city is not real, that it is never built at all, the crash is only a mirage, such as the one Merlin saw in which the city floated keel upwards (315:249-251).

Although, as Tillotson points out, Tennyson did in later years add passages to the Idylls which deepened the gloom surrounding the fall of Camelot,<sup>19</sup> he also wrote "Gareth and Lynette," probably the most joyful of the idylls, in the late eighteen sixties.





The optimism of this idyll lies not so much in the progress of the Round Table as in the ability of one youth to triumph over seemingly impossible odds. Granted, "Balin and Balan" was written in 1873. Yet it is not a tale of general gloom as much as of the inevitable failure of the absolutist's vision. Balin cannot reconcile himself to the impossibility of Arthur's vows. Fearing lest he break them and wrongly believing that the first slip should be his doom, he is indeed destroyed--not by the slip but because of the false perspective of his absolutism. He erred by making his success dependent upon the Queen's spotlessness. Man is never so limited unless he chooses to be. Therefore, Arthur in his death throes says to Bedivere: "Comfort thyself; what comfort is in me?" (449:411). It was probably on the same grounds that Tennyson argued against Carlyle's "one-man" theory.<sup>20</sup> The three queens who attended Arthur's coronation and promised to help him at his need did not fail him, as Bedivere implies (450:452-456), but in fact met him with the funeral barge. The implication is that faith, hope and love are the qualities which, unlimited by time, carry Arthur into the dawn.

Tennyson's optimism does not find a focus in the possibility or probability that civilization will stand and progress. In fact he sees this as a doubtful and illusory hope. His optimism is rather in his belief that "throughout the ages an increasing purpose runs," that man is free to ally himself with that purpose--order, truth, direction--and thereby gain heightened consciousness and more complete self-realization. Although evil is inescapable within



the temporal framework, it need not prevail and finally will be destroyed. Hallam records that in July, 1885 his father said:

"There may be an Evil Spirit but surely the Highest Being will in the end subdue him."<sup>21</sup>

Yet there is no doubt that the idea of progress held a fascination for him. On the most obvious level, a mind which finds comfort in order and direction will be attracted by demonstrations that natural laws wholly control and direct the universe, that forward motion can be seen in the past and anticipated in the future, and that chaos and darkness will certainly, if slowly, be overcome. Mattes and Killham have dealt at length with the elements of evolutionary theory in In Memoriam and The Princess, and with his eagerness to incorporate the contributions of evolutionary theory into his world view. But another aspect of his fascination with evolution was the possibility that here lay a means of linking his religious and his scientific interests. For not only did science hold out hope of steady progress towards a "crowning race," but Christian tradition also pointed towards a millenium, a state in which evil, suffering and imperfection shall be subdued and the children of God shall rule on the earth. Ernest Lee Tuveson, in his remarkable book Millenium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress, points out that a strong millennial vision dominated English religious thought from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and that the idea of progress as it was understood in the nineteenth century led directly out of the earlier religious millennial theories:

The religious concept of the millenium was transformed, even by supposedly orthodox theologians. Gradually the role of Providence was transferred to "natural laws," whereby alone God was





thought to operate in His world. Such a transfer from earlier conceptions of direct intervention by the deity was, of course, the product of a Cartesian and Newtonian emphasis on the universality and immutability of mathematical principles . . . . It became perfectly possible for such nineteenth century positivists as Comte, who insisted in the absolutely "scientific" character of their ideas, still to retain a belief in the basic pattern of the progressive millennialists.<sup>22</sup>

Joseph Mede, Henry More and Thomas Burnet, each directly associated with the Cambridge Platonist movement, were among the earliest to incorporate millennialism with an idea of progress based on scientific discoveries and conclusions. Such an attempt could be expected to go hand in hand with the rather unorthodox and liberal attitudes of the Cambridge movement towards epistemology and towards religious faith.

Tennyson's familiarity with the thought of the Cambridge Platonists is quite possibly a source for his frequent references linking religious and scientific aspects of the idea of progress. Tuveson quotes a passage from Robert Boyle which epitomizes the Platonist idea of progress:

And if it be a necessary imperfection of human nature that, whilst we remain in this mortal condition, the soul being confined to the dark prison of body, is capable . . . but of a dim knowledge; so much the greater value we ought to have for our Christian religion, since, by its means (and by no other without it) we may attain a condition, wherein, as our nature will otherwise be highly blessed and advanced; so our faculties will be elevated and enlarged, and probably made thereby capable of attaining degrees and kinds of knowledge, to which we are here but strangers.<sup>23</sup>

The darkness-light image, the idea of increasing consciousness of truth achieved through religious experience, and of knowledge growing from more to more are characteristically Tennysonian.

Most of the major works depend heavily on the concept of a





gradual moral and religious progress. Tennyson admires Hallam because he grew in knowledge and faith while mortal; he presumes Hallam will continue to do so hereafter. Although the Princess errs in attempting to emancipate women by isolating them from men, Tennyson leaves no doubt that he is wholly in agreement with the necessity of female education as a part of the great movement toward the dawn. Man and woman must work as one, "The two-cell'd heart beating with one full stroke"(159:289):

they rise or sink  
Together, dwarf'd or godlike, bond or free.  
For she that out of Lethe scales with man  
The shining steps of Nature, shares with man  
His nights, his days, moves with him to one goal. (159:243-247)

Once woman's role as the complement of man is achieved, and

these twain, upon the skirts of Time,  
Sit side by side, full-summ'd in all their powers,  
.....  
Then comes the statelier Eden back to men;  
Then reign the world's great bridals, chaste and calm;  
Then springs the crowning race of humankind.  
(159:271-272;277-279)

The same hope is evident in "Maud," for the hero's mood changes from despair at the darkness of his world to determination to struggle "in defense of the right" until "many a darkness into the light shall leap," and "noble thought be freer under the sun" (217:19,46,48). The Idylls is a tale of Arthur, a better than Uther, and of Merlin, a stronger than Bleys. Camelot has risen out of the forest: the steps of progress appear on a mural within her walls. Arthur has united the kingdom as none had before. Arthur's dependence upon earlier gains in civilization is symbolized in the woodwork



of his throne. The dragons which are symbols of his kingdom flow down from his crown and robe to mingle with the dragons in the old design on his throne:

the clear-faced King . . . sat  
 Robed in red samite, easily to be known,  
 Since to his crown the golden dragon clung,  
 And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,  
 And from the carven-work behind him crept  
 Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make  
 Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them  
 Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable  
 Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found  
 The new design wherein they lost themselves,  
 Yet with all ease. (386:430-440)

The woodwork on Arthur's throne is similar to that of Merlin's, which also contains a serpent and hints at the unknowable and loss.

Percivale describes Merlin's throne to Ambrosius:

In our great hall there stood a vacant chair,  
 Fashion'd by Merlin ere he past away,  
 And carven with strange figures; and in and out  
 The figures, like a serpent, ran a scroll  
 Of letters in a tongue no man could read.  
 And Merlin call'd it "the Seige Perilous,"  
 Perilous for good and ill; "for there," he said,  
 No man could sit but he should lose himself."  
 And once by misadventure Merlin sat  
 In his own chair, and so was lost. (403:167-176).

The carvings on Arthur's throne and Merlin's chair are like those on the gateposts of Camelot, which also contain "weird devices," "new things and old co-twisted," "dragon-boughts and elvish emblings" which "move, seethe, twine and curl" (315:221-230). In other words, Tennyson sees Camelot as a step in the progress towards a moral and religious ideal.

One of the most succinct expressions of Tennyson's urge to have a faith in progress which could combine scientific and religious realms is "The Making of Man":











"The Will of God is hereby known" has

on one side,  
Graven in the oldest tongue of all the world,  
"Take me," but turn the blade and ye shall see,  
And written in the speech ye speak yourself,  
"Cast me away!" (308:300-304)

Surely this is an indication that history is a long process of building and abandoning, building and abandoning. In the general movement of the Idylls can even be seen a parallel to the cycle of the seasons.<sup>27</sup> Yet "The Palace of Art" and In Memoriam express different opinions which, if they do not deny the cyclical view of history, at least modify it. The Soul, standing aloof from all creeds in a posture of observation and meditation, is

A spot of dull stagnation, without light  
Or power of movement, . . .  
Mid onward-sloping motions infinite  
Making for one sure goal;  
. . . . .  
A star that with the choral starry dance  
Join'd not, but stood, and standing saw  
The hollow orb of moving Circumstance  
Roll'd round by one fix'd law. (46:245-248;253-256)

Here Tennyson speaks of progress toward "one sure goal" as opposed to "the hollow orb of moving Circumstance." The contrast between a cyclic and a progressive view of history is made again in the elegy:

No doubt vast eddies in the flood  
Of onward time shall yet be made,  
And throned races may degrade;  
Yet, O ye mysteries of good,  
  
Wild Hours that fly with Hope and Fear,  
If all your office had to do  
With old results that look like new--  
If this were all your mission here,  
. . . . .  
Why, then my scorn might well descend  
On you and yours. I see in part  
That all, as in some piece of art,  
Is toil coöperant to an end. (195:CXXVIII)



This is an important passage for an understanding of his view of history. Here he carefully puts the cyclic theory into his perspective of progress towards "one far-off divine event." There may indeed be a cyclic motion, but a third dimension is superimposed upon the cycle. History may move man forward.

Because of this third dimension he can say "My faith is large in Time" (86:25) in spite of the riddle of beauty and anguish which the cyclic theory cannot transcend. Only in time can redemption occur, as Eliot would say: redemption both of society and of the individual. But Tennyson never confuses the one with the other, the "secular to-be" with the "one far-off divine event."<sup>28</sup> The secular to-be involves "the doubtful doom of man" (dependent upon his freedom to create or destroy), whereas the divine event is beyond time, at the point where Hesper and Phosphor meet. This is the finite-infinite vision which Tennyson describes in "De Profundis" and "The Higher Pantheism."

At this point Tennyson breaks with Herbert Spencer, who would combine a scientific utopianism with religious millennialism, and deny man the freedom to create history. Here, too, he breaks with T. H. Huxley, who although he would accept the idea of limited moral freedom, freedom which enables man to defy evolutionary forces for a limited period, cannot



escape the conviction that history and time are ultimates.

Arthur Carr comments indirectly on Tennyson's optimism when he says that to the extent that the poet has a monistic theory of evil he cannot portray tragedy:

Because he could sometimes make the transcendental leap in his own experience, he is bemused into regarding it as an objective truth common to all men. Thus he inclines to further in his art the idyllic mood rather than the tragic perspectives that a genuine dualism might have afforded. Nevertheless, the tragic view develops, almost surreptitiously, in the themes of defeat and disaster that dominate Idylls of the King and even the play.<sup>29</sup>

Carr is unhappy with a "false" dualism which is able to make a transcendental leap, and prefers a "genuine" dualism which does not go beyond the paradox that man yearns for good while both working and suffering evil. He is willing to accept on the basis of its realism the death of Hallam, the destruction of Camelot, the suffering of Becket. But he feels uneasy to watch Hallam disappear into light on a dragon-ship with shining sides, to hear Arthur being welcomed to Avilion, to hear Becket's dying words: "into thy hands, O Lord--into thy hands!--" (Oxford:698).

There is no contradiction, however, between Tennyson's optimism (or his idyllic mood, as Carr would say) and his sensitivity to the horror of human life. The optimism gathers strength from the tragic sensibility; it is not an escape from the horror but the result of exploring its depths. Becket is tragic in so far as it presents a highly conscious individual--a hero who because of his very nobility endures more suffering than that of which a lesser consciousness is capable. It transcends tragedy in so far as Becket





increases in consciousness and moves toward God as a result of his suffering and death. In his "idyllic mood" Tennyson did not evade defeat or disaster, he saw that they could purify and raise the human spirit because of its ability to escape time and space.



## SUMMARY

None of the varying estimations of Tennyson's idea of history--that he was optimistic in youth but pessimistic in old age, that he was an evolutionary optimist, or that he held a cyclic view of history--can be adequately assessed without taking into account his idea of immortality. He believed that after time, or death, the individual continues to move towards light and God. He conceived God to be suprapersonal. Life in time is valuable only as it is growth towards the light, not simply as a state of existence, nor even as a process of physical and material improvement. There is a deep optimism which pervades his work, but it arises from his belief that evil finally will be overcome by good in the "one far-off divine event," and that the individual can in the meantime move toward the light. He did not believe that every day in every way things were getting better and better. He was highly attracted to the idea of progress which combined scientific and religious concepts of evolution. However, his belief in the freedom of man and in the well-spring of evil within man, an aspect of man's finitude, made him conclude that human growth towards a god-like state in which knowledge and wisdom are one is contingent. Evolution may or may not continue, although the present mass of evil in the world is a dark cloud on the horizon. The only certainty about the direction of history is that the Universe moves toward a divine event which is distinct from the secular to-be. Tennyson valued history as a record of the nature of man, for he put no ultimate faith in science, economics, sociology



or politics. History is cyclical only to the extent that it reproduces men who cannot escape their finite-infinite nature.

Therefore the past is of more value than the present as a subject for art. He felt the present valued the material and the "natural" at the expense of "the true world within the world we see."





#### IV

##### IDYLLS OF THE KING: A READING

But speaking generally, it is far, far better to distinguish poetry into different classes; and, instead of fault-finding, to say this belongs to such or such a class--thus voting inferiority in the sort rather than censure on the particular poem or poet . . . . In short, the wise is the genial; and the genial judgment is to distinguish accurately the character and characteristics of each poem, praising them according to their force and vivacity in their own kind--and to reserve reprehension for such as have no character--tho' the wisest reprehension would be not to speak of them at all.

S. T. Coleridge<sup>1</sup>

Some readers have found the mythic subject-matter and the discontinuous narrative technique of Idylls of the King so disconcerting that they are unable to appreciate the ideas and themes of the poem.<sup>2</sup> Therefore it may be well to take Coleridge's critical advice--to explain the sort of poem Tennyson was writing and the methods he used--before discussing content. Two questions arise. First, why did he choose Arthurian myth as the subject for this longest of his works, the one which occupied his creative faculties for fifty years of his life. Second, why did he reverse the process begun by Malory, who attempted to untangle the many twistings and turnings in the narratives of his French sources to produce a relatively straightforward sequential narrative? Why did Tennyson use a discontinuous narrative technique not only in individual tales, such as "Balin and Balan," but also in the narrative as a whole?

Once these questions have been answered, other questions



rising from the themes may be approached with more confidence. The epilogue to the poem speaks of "shadowing Sense at war with Soul,/ Ideal manhood closed in real man," rather than telling the story of Arthur for the sake of historical interest. But this is vague. What does Tennyson mean by sense and what by soul? From the prominent place given to adultery throughout the poem it is clear that this motif is intended as a comment on the theme of Sense at war with Soul. Adultery was a common characteristic of the Courtly Love tradition which plays so large a role in the Arthurian Cycle. Of the four laws of Courtly Love listed by Andreas Capellanus --sensuality, illicitness, secrecy and servitude--three operate in the Idylls with the approval of Arthur.<sup>3</sup> But Arthur insists that the love of a knight for a lady not be illicit. Does this departure not spoil the effect of using the Courtly Love tradition?

Another problem is Tennyson's disapproval of the expressions of religious fervour by the followers of the Holy Grail and of King Pellam. This disapproval seems inconsistent with Arthur's claim that "God fulfils himself in many ways," and with the poet's private statements that all religions have some degree of truth. One more difficulty is that many of the characters are stereotypes. Bors is honest, Galahad is pure, Gawain is light of heart, Modred is cunning, Lancelot is courteous. Does this kind of characterization not detract from the plausibility of the theme? Or can it be shown that Tennyson deliberately used it as a means of thematic development?



That Tennyson should turn to Arthurian material for subject matter in the mid-fifties is surprising, for he knew in advance that it would not be well-received by the critics and that what was wanted was poetry dealing with contemporary events and issues. Ruskin wrote to him: "So great power ought not to be spent on visions of things past but on the present."<sup>4</sup> The violence of critics in 1832 had seriously inhibited his work; only with the 1842 volumes and more recently In Memoriam had he begun to regain his confidence. Then why turn to myth and away from "idyls of the hearth" and lyric poetry?

The explanation is to be found in the purpose with which he wrote Idylls of the King and in his view of the peculiar advantages of myth. There is little doubt that he intended the poem to be the most significant or serious of his works, that he looked upon it somewhat as Wordsworth looked upon The Excursion. He believed that the Arthurian cycle provided the "greatest of all poetical subjects."<sup>5</sup> Since his Cambridge days he had been writing Arthurian poems; he worked on the Idylls for almost fifty years and after it was completed continued to write Arthurian poetry. He read every available Arthurian source, even travelling to places historically or traditionally connected with Arthur in order to hear the legends from the local people and to better assimilate the atmosphere surrounding Arthur and his knights. At one point he said in jest to Knowles that he considered himself probably the foremost authority on the subject in England.<sup>6</sup>







That he took the poem and the subject matter so seriously suggests that if he had ideas about the highest purpose of poetry or about the most significant themes of poetry, then he would attempt to incorporate this purpose and these themes in the Idylls.

"The Poet's Song" does contain a statement of the highest purpose of a poet. The poem was first printed in 1842, along with "Morte d'Arthur." It was left unchanged for over forty years, then slightly altered--one word, "fly," was changed to "bee." That he should make only this small revision after forty years suggests that the poem continued to represent his feelings. In it he speaks of poetry as gay, loud and sweet, singing of "what the world will be/ When the years have died away" (115). It causes bird and beast of prey in the midst of their plundering to stop and stare. In other words, poetry has a prophetic mission and a moral mission, one which may bring joy, and which speaks of non-temporal issues. "Merlin and the Gleam," an obviously autobiographical poem, also speaks of the purpose which absorbed Tennyson throughout his lifetime. Now an old man, Merlin tells of being obsessed since his childhood by an urge to find "the Gleam." It has always appeared to him just a step beyond, lighting at one period of his life on "the city and the palace/ Of Arthur the King." Now it has moved on and is "all but in Heaven." He defines it negatively as "Not of the sunlight,/ Not of the moonlight,/ Not of the starlight," but moving on "thro the Magic/ Of Him the Mighty." The Mighty is "the Wizard/ Who Found me at sunrise (in childhood)/ Sleeping, and woke me/



And learn'd me Magic!" These poems together indicate that Tennyson had a sense of mission which prompted him first to search out and then to write of spiritual themes, however these may be described. There is a distinctly religious atmosphere in both poems, as indeed there is in the Idylls itself. To say that the Gleam is not of the sunlight, moonlight or starlight is similar to saying that it is "of what the world will be/ When the years have died away."

Tennyson looked upon himself as a Bard, as a Merlin figure with Merlin's powers and responsibilities, long before the 1850s. On more than one occasion he signed himself in letters to editors of journals and newspapers as Merlin or Taliessen.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, he spoke of feeling as though he had a sacred responsibility to his audience, and as though his lips, like the lips of Isaiah, had been touched with a live coal from off the altar.<sup>8</sup> Merlin is well-known as the builder of Camelot, the city built to music, and as the sage who alone understands the mysteries surrounding Arthur and his kingdom. Merlin is guardian of the charm sought by Vivien, which, like the Hesperidean apples, is a potent danger in the hands of the unwise. When Tennyson began to write the Idylls he wanted to find some means of expressing moral and spiritual ideas, and to deal with what he believed to be truths of the human spirit.

Myth was an eminently suitable subject matter for his purpose. One of the characteristics of myth is that it consists of themes or stories which have a powerful attraction quite apart from any particular work of art in which they find expression.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the artist begins with a receptive audience. As early as 1829, in



"Timbuctoo," Tennyson recognizes this advantage. As the poem opens the narrator is found meditating on one of the

legends quaint and old  
Which whilome won the hearts of all on earth  
Toward their brightness, ev'n as flame draws air;  
But had their being in the heart of man  
As air is th' life of flame. (778)

As he meditates he is visited by the Spirit of "the great vine of Fable" which reaches to all corners of the earth. The Spirit teaches the narrator both by precept and by example the function of legend. He first enlarges the narrator's mental capacity in order to give him a comprehensive vision of the universe and of human history, and to set the legend of Timbuctoo within this enlarged context. As the narrator has had his mind enlarged while meditating upon ancient legends, says the Spirit, so all men may be enlightened:

I play about his heart a thousand ways,  
Visit his eyes with visions, and his ears  
With harmonies of wind and wave and wood,--  
Of winds which tell of waters, and of waters  
Betraying the close kisses of the wind--  
And win his heart unto me. (780)

The function of myth is to teach man "to attain/ By shadowing forth the Unattainable." It was the unattainable, the "Gleam," which Tennyson sought all his life and with which he was primarily concerned in the Idylls.<sup>10</sup>

Arthurian myth was particularly suitable because of the revival it had had in the first half of the nineteenth century. Since the new edition of Malory in 1816, the edition which first aroused Tennyson's interest, Arthurian literature had become almost a vogue. Britain, with an awakened sense of Empire, was magnetically







drawn by these tales of her origins. Moreover, the Arthurian cycle contained the religious themes which had intrigued Tennyson since his childhood. The parallel between heavenly and earthly courts was there quite independently of him.

A second advantage of using mythic subject matter is that the artist is thereby able to avoid entanglement with the local and transient. Tennyson makes this advantage quite clear in the epilogue, where he distinguishes between a story told for the sake of historical interest and a story told as a means of entry into the thoughts and feelings of all men. Addressing the Queen, he asks her to

accept this old imperfect tale,  
New-old, and shadowing Sense at war with Soul,  
Ideal manhood closed in real man,  
Rather than that gray king whose name, a ghost,  
Streams like a cloud, manshaped, from mountain peak,  
And cleaves from cairn and cromlech still. (450:36-41)

The Idylls is written to throw into relief, or to "shadow" the tensions between Sense and Soul rather than to describe incidents in the life of Arthur. Tennyson, above all others, was capable of providing a factual and detailed life of Arthur or at least a detailed account of the legend surrounding him. But he carefully avoided doing so in order to achieve one of the major effects of myth. Rather than provide "realism" of character, myth concentrates upon one or two overwhelming events or situations. The lack of detail does not prevent the reader from feeling the profound relevance of the myth to his own life, but rather makes it more likely by reducing the number of limiting or conditional elements.



In the Idylls we see not several people coming into conflict, but several events or attitudes--almost archetypal--and their bearing on each other. The kind of question we ask is not "What role do Balin and Balan play in Arthur's court" so much as "How is the brothers' fatal duel linked thematically to Merlin's imprisonment, to Elaine's death, and to Gareth's triumph over Time?"

A third reason for choosing mythic subject matter rather than lyric, historical or local, is that the artist may thereby avoid the charge of private interest. If such a charge cannot be laid, the reader is less likely to evade issues with which the artist is dealing. For example, "Maud" has been explained as the result of the poet's unhappy childhood love affairs, the product of a less than normal, less than happy mind.<sup>11</sup> By implication, the issues presented in "Maud" are not to be taken too seriously, or at least not as a valid comment on normal human experience. Similarly, In Memoriam has been described as a rather unnatural indulgence in grief over a period of almost twenty years.<sup>12</sup> To those who, as Ruskin and Jowett feared, would dismiss the poem as remote from "modern" concerns, Tennyson speaks in the Epilogue, saying that his tale is "new-old." Shelley made the same point in his Defence, arguing that poetry should avoid catalogues of detached facts, limited in applicability to time or place, and should present "the unchangeable forms of human nature." This is not to say that the issues presented in the Idylls may not be evaded by the reader, only that mythic subject matter removes common excuses for such evasion. "The Palace of Art" is about the fate of a Soul which does succeed in avoiding the issues which the



greatest artists of the Western world have presented. Among the outstanding works which surround the Soul in her palace of pleasure is a painting in which:

mythic Uther's deeply-sounded son  
           In some fair space of sloping greens  
 Lay, dozing in the vale of Avalon,  
           And watch'd by weeping queens. (44:105-108)

The fault of the Soul is that she does no more than contemplate, does no more than survey the worlds pictured to her in her gallery. Because she does not commit herself to one particular position, does not hold "some form of creed," she is all but damned. Until she abandons her position of stagnation and joins "the choral starry dance" of real life, submitting herself to the possibility of growth, she finds herself "on fire within."

It was because any single interpretation, any limitation of the poem to historical events or to local situations, would seriously inhibit the participation of the reader in the mind of the poet that Tennyson refused to provide an allegorical reading or to admit that there was one. At first he had planned the poem as simple allegory. In 1833 he drew up a table in which Arthur represented religious faith; Merlin, science; Modred (to whom was wedded the daughter of Merlin), the sceptical understanding; Escalibur, war; the sea, the Saxon people; the Round Table, liberal institutions; the first Guinevere, primitive Christianity; the second Guinevere, Roman Catholicism.<sup>13</sup> The limitations of such a scheme are obvious. Fortunately he abandoned it. In 1842 he published "The Day Dream," in which he speaks of his poetry not as meaningless, nor as tied







to any single interpretation, but shaped

for your delight  
Like long-tail'd birds of Paradise  
That float thro' heaven, and cannot light,  
Or old-world trains, upheld at court  
By Cupid-boys of blooming hue. (99:274-278)

His readers are responsible for finding meaning in the poem for themselves.

Much later, when pressed about the allegorical interpretation of the Idylls he said:

I hate to be tied down to say, "This means that," because the thought within the image is much more than any one interpretation.... Every reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability, and according to his sympathy with the poet.... It is not the history of one man or of one generation but of a whole cycle of generations.<sup>14</sup>

His readers knew the details of the Arthurian legends as they knew the details of the parliamentary reform bills. He was not interested in having them learn another set of details about his poem. What they did not know was the complex world of the Idylls, a world of subtle moral and spiritual relationships which could not be conveyed in a simple system. Therefore he felt "It is no use doing a mere réchauffé of old legends."<sup>15</sup> He wanted to gain their ear, then to make them conscious of values and motives rather than of facts and systems. Myth was the most effective tool at hand for this purpose.

Once Tennyson had settled the issue of subject matter he had to choose an adequate form. During a long period of indecision he made at least two false starts. In "The Epic" he hints that he once wrote a long Arthurian epic. Then for awhile he wavered between



another epic and a musical masque. In an early notebook is the rough draft of a scenario, into which the Lancelot and Elaine scenes were afterwards introduced.<sup>16</sup> The form which he decided upon has caused a good deal of consternation among critics. Generally the poem is treated either as a collection of idyls similar to the pastoral idyls of Theocritus and Virgil, or as a poor attempt at narrative.<sup>17</sup> Both treatments pose difficulties.

Tennyson himself said: "Regarding the Greek derivation, I spelt my Idylls with two ls, mainly to divide them from the ordinary pastoral idyls usually spelt with one l. These idylls group themselves round one central figure."<sup>18</sup> The poem is not a collection of little pictures in which the chief value of landscape is to highlight the mood of each picture. It is a series of incidents with many complex inter-relationships, in which elements of landscape have symbolic overtones which carry through from the beginning to the end. The unity in the Idylls, as he hints in his distinction between his work and Greek idyls, is much more intricate than in "the ordinary pastoral idyls." In Idylls of the King human psychology plays a larger part than in the shorter Greek pieces.

The problems which arise when the poem is treated as a narrative are more obvious. It has no single narrative thread running from beginning through middle to end. The coming and passing of Arthur do act as terminal points, but in the other idylls he is not the chief figure. They are written about and named after various knights, ladies and events; the deeds of the King are of secondary importance. Even within single books there is little



narrative development. Many figures and incidents appear, no one is dominant. Seldom is a quest followed to completion without several digressions.

Tennyson's contemporaries certainly would have been unable to read the poem as a narrative of sequential events, because of the great gaps between the installments of the poem, and the order in which the idylls appeared. The first published was the record of Arthur's death. Then came the idylls named after four ladies: Enid, Vivien, Elaine and Guinevere. "Gareth and Lynette," and "Balin and Balan," second and fifth of the final order, were the last to be published.

Moreover, whenever an opportunity for narrative suspense arises within the poem Tennyson seems to sabotage it deliberately, as if he wished to direct attention away from the narrative. Sometimes, as in "The Marriage of Geraint," he first announces the conclusion of the action, then spends the whole of the idyll either explaining the details leading up to that conclusion or providing little scenes not related to the conclusion but giving insights into the nature of the people involved. He uses foreshadowing frequently and obviously. For instance, in the concluding lines of "Geraint and Enid" he says that Geraint spent a virtuous life and died a noble death fighting in Arthur's last battle. From the first, the outcome of the Round Table and of Arthur's career is never in doubt. Similarly, the fate of Merlin is foreshadowed several times early in the idyll "Merlin and Vivien." When







Tennyson writes about Gareth, the most triumphant of the knights, he dismisses the conclusion as uncertain and inconsequential.

The purpose of Gareth's first quest is to rescue the damsel Lyonors from four bullying knights. As he proceeds to conquer the knights one by one at least as much tension is derived from the change in attitude of Lynette towards this "kitchen knave" as from the overthrow of the knights. Finally she even prefers him over Lancelot as her hero. If the narrative itself were of first importance the logical climax of the quest would emphasize either the liberation of Lyonors or the marriage of one of the sisters to Gareth. Instead, the climax is the final barrier in the quest, and the effective conclusion is a very subdued statement, "and Gareth won the quest." There is no reunion scene, no meeting of lovers. The only revel is that of Lyonors, who "made merry over Death,/ As being after all their foolish fears/ And horrors only proven a blooming boy." She has no acclaim for Gareth at all. As if in afterthought the poet concludes the idyll quite flatly with a brief triplet which abruptly distances the narrative element:

And he that told the tale in older times  
Says that Sir Gareth wedded Lyonors,  
But he that told it later says Lynette. (333:1392-95)

This is only a tale told before, one which everyone knows, and in which the usual narrative qualities of unity, motivation and suspense are almost non-existent.

The key to an understanding of the technique in the Idylls lies in a comparison with the technique of Malory and that in the other sources which Tennyson uses. It is significant that the



characteristics of narrative in the Idylls--disjointedness, digression, elaboration of marginally-related events--are the very characteristics of which Malory complained in the "French books" from which he took the elements of his Le Morte Darthur and other Arthurian works. He was distressed to find a collection of tales without any beginning, middle or end, and without any recognizable order or pattern. As Eugene Vinaver has pointed out, Malory was determined not to lose his way in the jumble.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, he felt one of his most important tasks was to impose order of a certain kind--that of unilinear narrative sequence--on the material with which he worked. He searched through the tales available, collected those which could be fitted together into a single major narrative, such as the death of Arthur, and rejected all the "extraneous" elements. It is quite possible that Tennyson, who used the same sources as Malory as well as Malory's adaptation of these sources, recognized the different techniques, and himself chose to retain that of the originals rather than of Malory.

Vinaver's explanation of the differences between Malory's version of the Arthurian cycle and the versions of the earlier bards of French and Welsh romance is that Malory marks the beginning of a radically different aesthetic idiom, one which has prevailed right up to the twentieth century. Both idioms, that which was common in medieval romance and that of Malory, have their own valid structures. But these structures have very little in common. Malory was simply unable to grasp the principles of



composition in the Arthurian cycle. He succeeded brilliantly in adapting his material to another idiom, and in so doing perhaps helped prevent the Arthurian cycle from disappearing. But in spite of his success in superimposing a new form, elements of the original remained.

In a statement recorded by Fitzgerald Tennyson indicated that he appreciated the strengths of Malory, but was uneasy with the form he used:

I could not read "Palmerin of England" nor "Amadis," nor any other of those Romances through. The "Morte d'Arthur" is much the best: there are fine things in it, but all strung together without Art.<sup>20</sup>

"Palmerin of England" and "Amadis" were inferior examples of the narrative forms which arose in the sixteenth century, as Vinaver explains. The "art" that Malory's work (the best of the new idiom) lacked was an integral part of medieval romance, and was incorporated by Tennyson in the Idylls.

The two major principles of composition controlling the structure of medieval romance are polycentricity and interlacing.<sup>21</sup> Instead of one theme or thread the pre-sixteenth century bards used several (building a "many-centered" work of art). The themes were not independent, however, but complemented each other. An essential part of the method of composition is reintroduction of threads which have appeared earlier, and a carrying forward of all simultaneously. This is the technique of interlacing. For example, a knight will gallop into the forest on a quest, then just as he is properly started on his journey, will be intercepted by a young







damsel crying for aid. He immediately abandons his first quest and sets off in pursuit of this second. No sooner is he in the middle of the second quest than a third comes along, to be taken up in turn. However, the early quests are never wholly abandoned. Sooner or later the knight gets back onto the track--after the reader has found out a good deal about him, or after a new situation has added bits and pieces of information to the total picture of the knight's world, bits and pieces which increase our understanding of the implications of each of the quests which have been "abandoned."

Complexity rather than simplicity is the mark of this idiom. The very characteristics which are anathema to chronologically developed narrative are the prime methods of the older art form: digression, amplification, elaboration. The final result is a tapestry in which many threads of different colours appear and disappear from the surface, but in which all move forward simultaneously, appearing in the appropriate places under the guidance of a master weaver who superimposes, contrasts and highlights each thread. Many minor patterns contribute to a large pattern.

This aesthetic idiom offers several advantages. One of the greatest is a kind of unity quite different from that of unilinear narrative. The challenge of the art of interlacing is to forge links between originally independent episodes and to establish relationships between themes which had hitherto existed in isolated form.<sup>22</sup> If the artist is successful he is able to keep many themes in the consciousness of the reader by continually reintroducing earlier threads. Each time that a new narrative thread is introduced



it adds a comment to the themes developed earlier.

A good example of the way in which unity is created appears in "The Last Tournament." Many narrative threads are in this idyll: Dagonet and Tristram, the discovery of Nestling, the challenge of the Red Knight, the passive rebellion of the knights, the Tournament, Sir Tristram and his triangular love affair, King Mark, and the flight of Guinevere. These do not follow each other chronologically, nor is any told in one breath. As the reader proceeds only parts of each incident are revealed, the incident is interrupted by another, then again referred to later on. Yet each brings in a wealth of comment and implication on the others. For instance, the Red Knight's accusation that Arthur is a "woman-worshipper" has significance for the Arthur-Guinevere, Lancelot-Guinevere, Tristram-Isolt and Tristram-Queen Isolt relationships. The cry of Isolt the White as she struggles with Queen Isolt for the necklace: "These be no rubies, this is frozen blood," is a comment upon the Tournament, upon Lancelot's scaling of "the perilous nest" (reminiscent of Gareth's reference to Arthur's nest), upon the Red Knight, the red wine flowing in the northern castle and at the Tournament, and upon Queen Isolt, whose neck is finally graced by the ruby carcanet.

A second effect of these two principles of composition is the creation of an atmosphere potential for expansion and diversity, for growth, and for freedom from the limitations of time and space.<sup>23</sup> Because no one narrative dominates, it is possible for the author--or someone else--at some future time to add to the cycle



of tales and elaborate what already exists. In fact this is the way Tennyson composed the Idylls. The completed poem contains books added to the beginning, inserted in the middle and tacked on the end of the first installment or collection of four idylls. When he wrote the early idylls, he had not conceived the later ones. Since strictly speaking there is no single beginning or end, each narrative thread can be indefinitely extended into the past and into the future. Tennyson carefully allows for this by leaving Merlin locked up alive in a tree, Arthur carried off alive to the island-valley of Avilion. Nor does he go into explicit detail about the beginnings of Merlin's career or Arthur's, detail which would prevent future expansion. To one poem come little incidents about knights from distant lands--France and Ireland, the North, the West, and the East. Tales about the distant past and the far-off future intermingle with tales of the "present." The attraction of this characteristic must have been tremendous for Tennyson, with his sensitivity to the limitations of time and space and his interest in the noumenal. One of the major themes in the Idylls, to be explained below, is the theme of growth. These techniques of medieval romance provided an important means of emphasizing that theme.

Another major effect of polycentricity and interlacing is the provision of motivation for the action. The motivation does not depend upon logic or psychology. It is not related to the laws of human behaviour, which are relied upon for motivation in the modern







idiom. Rather, the motivation of medieval romance depends upon structural relationships between two or more incidents. Perhaps the best explanation is by way of example. Pelleas, the boy-man who has mistaken lust for love and greed of fame for a calling, is rudely awakened to his delusions by finding Gawain sleeping with Ettarre. Gawain had promised to plead Pelleas' case with Ettare in order to win her love for the doting youth. In rage Pelleas lays his "naked sword across their naked throats" and steals away, leaving them to awake. But now he must return weaponless through the wilds to Camelot. Why not have kept Gawain's sword? Or at least have slain them where they lay? The "reason" becomes clear some time later when Pelleas arrives at court after having encountered Sir Lancelot on the way. When Guinevere asks him if his gloomy countenance is due to his being unhorsed by Lancelot he answers nothing. But when she asks if he has other griefs his rage and frustration break out of him:

Pelleas lifted up an eye so fierce  
 She quail'd, and he, hissing "I have no sword,"  
 Sprang from the door into the dark. (442:589-591)

His cry evokes the sword motif which runs throughout the poem. Excalibur is the weapon with which Arthur conquers the heathen in his determination to see the holy vows of the Round Table prevail. The sword is everywhere a symbol of faith. But Pelleas has become a knight not because of the strength of his faith in Arthur or in the vision of Christ which motivates Arthur, but because of his wish to further his own ends. He cried out to Arthur "Make me thy knight,



because I know, Sir King,/ All that belongs to Knighthood, and I love." (413:7-8). Having no faith, he has no sword. Therefore he cannot recognize the true nature of Ettarre, and is unable to stand when he sees the evil which is in her and Gawain. He, like Geraint, who also travels without weapons, lacks the purpose and the strength which his weapons symbolize. The next time Pelleas appears he is the Red Knight who has completely forsworn his vows to Arthur and set up his own court by vowing the opposite of that to which Arthur holds. Without these other situations in which the sword figures prominently Pelleas' action and his cry have little meaning. Together, the whole poem gathers force.

Vinaver takes great care to make this distinction between psychological and structural, or thematic motivation in the idiom of medieval romance.<sup>24</sup> It should be emphasized that Pelleas has no conscious or unconscious motivation for returning to Camelot swordless. Yet because of the sword theme running throughout the poem his action becomes necessary and meaningful within the larger context of Arthur's values. True, the action enables us to understand Pelleas, to explain his values. But it is not even indirectly motivated by those values. The action brings sharply into focus the sword motif prominent in several of the idylls, dealing with characters who have nothing to do with Pelleas. The structure of the Idylls rather than the mental processes of Pelleas provide the motive.

Hallam Tennyson records one of his father's comments which indicates that the poet consciously used the technique of the



majority of his sources:

He said it was next to impossible to put the thing properly together because he had taken up with a fragmentary mode of treatment instead of the continuous symbolic epic he had meditated in his youth.<sup>25</sup>

The fragmentary mode of treatment, which is to say the use of polycentricity and interleaving, can be seen quite clearly in "Balin and Balan." The idyll contains five distinct narrative threads: those of King Pellam, Balin and Balan, Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot, and Vivien. Yet each of them is subtly linked to the others. Tennyson did not find these together in his sources, he carefully interwove them after he had found the title-story in Malory.

The steps in the composition of the idyll can be traced in the notebooks he used.<sup>26</sup> When he composed the Idylls he had two habits, the second of which seldom appears in the composition of works outside of the Idylls.<sup>27</sup> The first was to use generally only the right-hand side of the page, reserving the left-hand side for alterations. The second was to leave great gaps between segments of the narrative even if the narrative itself did not warrant these gaps. Sometimes the gaps were only half a page, but often they were a whole page or more. He quite probably left these gaps in order that he could come along later and interweave other bits of narrative, other themes.

The text of "Balin and Balan" is contained in four notebooks held in the Houghton Reading Room of Harvard College Library. The following table provides<sup>2</sup> description, the location







and the approximate length of each of the parts of the idyll. The "reference" column contains the number of the appropriate notebook, followed by the number of the leaf on which the script appears. The letter "v" indicates that the entry is on the reverse side of the leaf, and the asterisks indicate that the entry was made with the book held upside down. The "Leaves" column indicates the number of consecutive leaves on which a single entry occurs.

<u>Reference</u>	<u>Leaves</u>	<u>Description</u>
32:27v	7	The title-story and the Garlon incident.
33:4	1	Guinevere and Lancelot (361:264-271).
33:6	1	Vivien (364:432-3, 454-6).
33:10	1	Vivien leaving the dying brothers. (366:576-9).
37:5	2	Pellam, quoted from Malory.
37:10v*	1	Balin and the woodsman.
37:11v*	2	Pellam, part prose, part verse (357:1-9).
47:65v	2	Vivien (364:430-57).

The first point to be made is that each entry consists of only one incident or narrative thread, set well apart both in pagination and probably in time from the other threads. Tennyson collected all the pieces before he began to interlace them. The narrative of the two brothers was taken from Malory. When he put it into poetry he clearly intended to add to it elements not contained in his source and probably not related to the title-story, for the gaps left in the script are not warranted by the tale.



Notebook 37 contains three clear-cut stages in the interlacing process. The chronological order of the entries is: leaf 5, leaf 11v\* and leaf 10v\*, because the notebook was held upside down for the last two entries, and because of the development, which is quite obvious in the text itself. The first entry is a direct prose quotation from Malory. The second is a versification of part of that quotation into what is now lines one to eight of the published idyll. In the third entry the Pellam incident is linked to the Balin and Balan thread by means of the incident in the woods, when Balin meets and helps the woodcutter, by whom he is warned of Sir Garlon, Pellam's heir.

In Notebook 33 is evidence of a polishing process in which parts of the Vivien narrative, originally intended to be introduced in "Merlin and Vivien," are taken and shifted to the preceding idyll, "Balin and Balan." The two references to Vivien mentioned in the table above are taken from an early draft of the "Merlin and Vivien" idyll contained on four pages beginning with leaf twelve of the same notebook. This four page entry was divided into three: the song of Vivien as she meets Balin, her departure from the dying brothers, and her arrival at Camelot. The last is now in the published version of "Merlin and Vivien." In the original four-page entry Vivien comes to Camelot bearing the tale of having seen the two brothers dead in the woods. Tennyson accomplishes the "reweaving" by introducing a direct confrontation between the temptress and Balin. The benefits of the change are obvious. He is able to make a more distinct contrast between Vivien's idea of



love as she expresses it in her song and Balin's worship of the Queen, together with his horror that she should love in Vivien's manner. Moreover, this change provides a means of reintroducing the threads of the Guinevere-Lancelot narrative, the theme of gossip (Vivien gossips about them to Balin), and the illusory nature of reality (for Balin is driven to distraction by Vivien's version of "the truth"). With this one bit of interlacing Tennyson is able to enlarge upon several of the key issues in the poem.

It is not remarkable that such a painstaking and successful stylist should notice the difference between the principles of composition which Malory used and those in his older sources. Nor is it surprising that he should choose the medieval aesthetic idiom. The significance of this choice to his themes may be explained by a distinction which Northrop Frye draws between narrative form and mythic form:

Popular literature which appeals to the inertia of the untrained mind puts a heavy emphasis on narrative values, whereas a sophisticated attempt to disrupt the connection between the poet and his environment produces the Rimbaud type of illumination, Joyce's solitary epiphanies, and Baudelaire's conception of nature as a source of oracles.<sup>28</sup>

By breaking down the usual patterns of sequential narrative Tennyson forces the reader to find other patterns. These can be found only by comparing and contrasting many incidents which in terms of action are unrelated. The effect is to shift attention from fact and action to the larger world of value and perspective. Another statement from Frye helps clarify the process:

Literature, as it develops from the primitive to the self-conscious, shows a gradual shift of the poet's attention from narrative to significant values.<sup>29</sup>







The narratives of the English idyls and of the later "Enoch Arden" and "Aylmer's Field" were indeed more popular than the Arthurian myths, but they could not bear the weight of the values and insights expressed in the myths. They put too much emphasis upon narrative values, and depend too heavily upon the immediate environment of the poet.

Now that the problems of subject matter and of form in Idylls of the King have been dealt with at some length we turn to those questions of theme enumerated in the opening paragraphs of the chapter. What does Tennyson mean when he says that the major conflict is between sense and soul? Why does he depart from the courtly love convention of his sources and condemn adultery? Can his disapproval of certain expressions of religious fervor be reconciled with his statements that all expressions of religion hold some degree of truth? Finally, what is the effect of the flat, stereotyped characterization in the poem upon the theme of sense at war with soul?

In the most general terms Idylls of the King may be described as a poem of two worlds in conflict. These worlds are not described in geographical, political, military or religious terms as much as in terms of the kind of motion which predominates in them. Each world is a state of mind. Both are worlds of motion, but while one moves up, the other moves down; one moves towards the light, the other towards the darkness. One is a world of expanding consciousness, increasing moral, physical and sensuous







who for some inexplicable reason are a part of either one or the other of these worlds. Gareth, the child thought too young to do battle, too inexperienced to be left on his own to carry out a quest, "springs like flame from ashes" and alone conquers the most dreadful assaults of time (the four knights Morning-Star, Noon-Sun, Evening-Star and Death). His "protector," Lancelot, having ignominiously sneaked across three loops of the river encircling the Castle Perilous, swimming, in spite of the fact that Gareth has just cleared the bridges of their fierce guardians, shakes in his boots at the sight of Death. In contrast to Gareth, Pelleas degenerates from a mighty knight able to overthrow three opponents at once to a drunken gabbler who loses a battle and his life by over-balancing from his horse and falling into the mud. Enid, although led in disgrace by the irresponsible Geraint away from Camelot and through many awful trials, has greater strength than her lord. She finally triumphs through her loyalty and humility, and is brought back in glory to the city built to music. In contrast, Ettarre turns down Pelleas, who has every noble trait Geraint lacked; she prefers instead "some rough old knight who knew the worldly way,/ Albeit grizzlier than a bear, to ride/ And jest with" (416:185-8). Having sent him away forever she too late sees her error, and according to the teller of the tale, "wasted and pined, desiring him in vain" (420:486). Guinevere, who is so naive as to be unable to distinguish Arthur's face from those of his knights, and does not share his vision or motivation, finally sees her error, laments, gains moral strength greater than







that of Lancelot, and dies a holy woman. But Vivien, knowing from the first the distinctiveness of Arthur, chooses instead of the king "the grizzled fork" of Mark, using "fate and craft and folly" to destroy Camelot.

In some characters there is a distinct change, a movement from one world into another. The most obvious example is Merlin, once so wise that he alone could read the book of secrets which enabled him to build Camelot. Although he knew the riddling of the ancient bards, and over-shadowed the wisdom of his master Bleys, at the last he is unable to keep his secret from a coy wanton whose purpose he knows quite well. From the point at which he turns his gaze upon the approaching darkness threatening the kingdom, "a great melancholy" falls upon him. He becomes unable to see that Vivien is in the boat with him as he crosses to Brittany, unable to resist her seductions. Lancelot, once almost an equal of Arthur in battle, fails from the moment when, "his hand among the flowers," he becomes involved with Guinevere. He gradually is driven out of his mind and loses his courage and his courtesy, becoming little more than a lying coward. He skulks in the woods behind Gareth, and covers up his shield lions, symbol of bravery and strength. Finally he enters the tourney field in disguise and for no good reason opposes his own kinsmen. Tristram, once numbered with the greatest knights, so far loses his bravery that he hides in a grove while Mark passes by. At the Last Tournament he can only insult each woman in attendance. Later he is hardly able to recognize the grossness of his insult to Queen Isolt.



Tennyson uses animal imagery as one means of distinguishing between the two worlds of the Idylls. Those of the rising world exceed the animals' capacities, rising out of the beast, while those of the falling world exceed the animals' viciousness: "the beast was ever more and more,/ But man was less and less, till Arthur came" (304:11-12). Until the founding of the Round Table wolves would invade human settlements and carry off and raise human children, which then became "wolf-like men/ Worse than wolves" (304:32-33). When Edyrn, "the Sparrow-Hawk," arrived in the court he was "first as sullen as a beast new-caged,/ And waiting to be treated like a wolf" (356:855-56). Modred, would-be usurper of the throne, "like a subtle beast/ Lay couchant with his eyes upon the throne,/ Ready to spring" (434:10-12). With his "narrow foxy face" and "gray persistent eye" he watches the Queen and Lancelot until one day he is able to bring "his creatures" to catch them alone together. At the end he attacks Arthur himself, having collected "knights/ Once [Arthur's] whom [Arthur had] loved, but grosser grown/ Than heathen, spitting at their vows and him " (444:60-62). Snake imagery is progressively used to describe Vivien. Just before her moment of triumph over Merlin we are told that "her eyes and neck glittering went and came." In contrast to these beast-men, worse than beasts, are those who share Arthur's vision. They take part in the steps of progress portrayed in Arthur's hall. Percivale describes the scenes to Ambrosius:

And four great zones of sculpture, set betwixt  
 With many a mystic symbol, gird the hall;  
 And in the lowest beasts are slaying men.



And in the second men are slaying beasts,  
 And on the third are warriors, perfect men,  
 And on the fourth are men with growing wings.  
 (404:232-237)

At the last even Guinevere is able to see that Arthur, whom she had once thought too pure and remote to be real man, to be interesting as a man, is "highest and most human too" (442:644).

The false orders which set themselves up against the Round Table are easily recognized as false because of the effect they have upon their adherents. Those knights who pursue the Holy Grail "follow wandering fires,/ Lost in the quagmire," and are prevented from doing deeds of noble note. They are unable to recognize value in other men and women because of their pursuit, and in the end either return to Camelot in confusion or in some way find the whole purpose of their lives frustrated. They become less and less human rather than more and more. A similar atmosphere prevails in King Pellam's court, but is more obviously the result of perverted zeal. Pellam, finding Arthur's realm

Hath prosper'd in the name of Christ, the King,  
 Took as in rival heat, to holy things,  
 And finds himself descended from the Saint  
 Arimathean Joseph. (359:96-99)

He announces he has quite foregone matters of this world, and pushes all women aside, wife and damsel alike, for fear of pollution. Thereafter he spends his energy collecting relics: "priceless bones . . . ,/ Thorns of the crown and shivers of the cross" (359:107-108). His castle, which is frequented by demons, is built low to the ground, "overtopt with ivy-tods,/ A home of bats, in every tower an owl" (362:330-331). His knights hiss like







geese when Arthur's knight enters, and attack him twenty to one, "like wolves howling." They are unable to find the pursued Round Table knight, even when he is within their own castle, and futilely make a "blind rummage" throughout the darkened passageways. Balin, the pursued, although far from an ideal knight, easily outwits and outmaneuvers their best.

Sexual impotence and depravity marks the declining world, in spite of Vivien's claim to the contrary. The burden of her song, carolled through the woods as she approaches Balin and Camelot, is that "the fire of Heaven"--which within the context is clearly unrestrained sexuality--is not the fire of hell, and in fact is the "lord of all things good" (364:334f). Yet she accuses Arthur's court of sexual impurity, and deliberately uses her sexuality to tempt Arthur and Merlin, hoping to destroy Camelot. Similarly, Ettarre will have nothing to do with Pelleas' innocence, and chooses to ride with more practised and less inhibited partners.

Although Tennyson seems deliberately ambiguous about the case of the holy nun, sister of Percivale, who provides the original impetus for the Grail quest, there are overtones of distorted sexuality in her religious experience. She has turned to prayer and fasting only after her love for a man, "rudely blunted, glanced and shot/ Only to holy things" (401:75-76). Her vision of the Grail contains vivid sexual imagery:

then  
Stream'd thro' my cell a cold and silver beam,  
And down the long beam stole the Holy Grail,  
Rose-red with beatings in it, as if alive,



Till all the white walls of my cell were dyed  
 With rosy colors leaping on the wall,  
 And then the music faded, and the Grail  
 Past, and the beam decay'd, and from the walls  
 The rosy quiverings died into the night. (402:115-123)

The red here is reminiscent of Guinevere's ruby carcanet, of the red gown and wine at the Last Tournament, and of the Red Knight. In each case it denoted sexual perversion. She proceeds to cut off her hair (traditionally the seat of the soul) and with it to weave a sword-belt for Galahad, in which is woven a sign of the Grail. The link between the sword, elsewhere in the Idylls a sign of faith, and the Grail vision, is at least open to ironic interpretation. (The questers find their swords useless; Lancelot's is dashed from his hand in Carbonek). Then the nun binds the belt on her "bright boy-knight," who looks like her brother and is rumoured to be Lancelot's bastard. Her words to him are: "O thou, my love, whose love is one with mine,/ I, maiden, round thee, maiden, bind my belt" (403:158-159). She makes him hers, and he believes "in her belief."

Others of the declining world become sexually impotent or depraved. Percivale, who like the other followers of the Grail sees all people as shadows, is unable to realize sexual fulfillment. He cannot accept the love of a maiden when offered, although in his youth he had been deeply in love with her. Lancelot, who has been swept off his feet by Guinevere's allure, meets Elaine and finds with a shock that there is a degree of femininity of which he knows nothing:

He look'd, and more amazed  
 Than if seven men had set upon him, saw  
 The maiden standing in the dewy light.  
 He had not dreamed she was so beautiful.  
 Then came on him a sort of sacred fear. (385:348-352)



He can only admit that she is "true and sweet/ Beyond mine old belief in womanhood" (394:949-950), and that he is not worthy of her. He discovers, too late, that Arthur's world is the one in which sexual fulfillment is most fully realizable. Paradoxically, says Arthur, "Free love, so bound, were freest, . . ./. Let love be free; free love is for the best" (400:1369-1370). Other defenders of Vivien's brand of free love at the last swing around to Arthur's view: Guinevere, Ettarre and Gawain. Tristram suffers evil dreams, contempt and frustration before he is axed from behind by Mark. Vivien fades off into the distance, with the very forest which she insisted agreed with her philosophy echoing behind her, "Fool!" (380:972).

The area of human sexuality, then, is also one in which rebellious knights become worse than animals, worse than heathen, while dedicated followers, like Gareth, "spring like fire from ashes," and each does "mightier deeds than otherwise he had done" (432:675). When faced by difficulties that becloud the minds of other men, they see clearly into the nature of things. Each, like Arthur, finds that "in this heathen war, the very fire of God fills him" (385:314-315). As Gareth claims, "those who walk the fire do not mind the smoke," and therefore they have mental acuity to discern the mystery of the King and his Order. Arthur found in battle that

the world  
Was all so clear about him that he saw  
The smallest rock on the faintest hill,  
And even in high day the morning star. (305:96-99)





As they approach him in dedication the knights find that they approach him, "he who knows," in capability and achievement.

Perhaps the single greatest challenge to readers of the Idylls is to discover the nature of the vision which lies at the center of the expanding world. How are we to define Arthur's source of energy? The knights do not seem to share precisely the same vision, for they follow the King. Why is it that Pelleas fails while Gareth succeeds in his pursuit of that nebulous dream or idea to which Camelot owes its existence? Tennyson himself seems to feel that to be too precise in the definition of that source of energy, of that ideal which mysteriously drew some while it repulsed others, is to distort it. He refuses to let any single interpretation of the poem be recognized as adequate, or even to admit that a single one is possible.<sup>30</sup> He will only say: "Each reader must find his own interpretation according to his ability and according to his sympathy with the poet."<sup>31</sup> In "Merlin and the Gleam" he speaks of himself as Merlin and of the Gleam as something very much like Arthur's vision, providing him with a lifelong stimulus. The Gleam moves to the music of Camelot and flits from place to place. It is always just ahead of him, touching such figures as ordinary country folk as well as Arthur, but always leading him on. Finally it leads him to the last limit of the land, from which he sees it hover ahead, "all but in heaven." He defines it only with negatives:



Not of the sunlight,  
 Not of the moonlight,  
 Not of the starlight,

and concludes the poem with an urgent admonition to young Mariners to pursue it with haste "ere it vanishes/ Over the margin" (550).

It may be well to begin, at least, as Tennyson does by defining the Gleam which motivates the expanding world of the Idylls with negatives. For example, it already has been noted that whatever causes the rise or decline of various characters, whatever lies at the center of the two worlds, is neither Arthur himself nor the vows of the Round Table. Individuals rise or fall according to something within themselves, whether or not they give vocal allegiance to the King.

Remarkably, that which energizes the rising world also energizes the falling world. For the latter is motivated not so much by an ideal as by an antipathy. Lot rises up against Arthur. King Pellam, finding Arthur's realm "Hath prosper'd in the name of Christ, the King,/ [Takes], as in rival heat, to holy things" (359:96-97). Vivien, too, is motivated by a negative passion. She

ever sought to work the charm  
 Upon the great enchanter of the time,  
 As fancying that her glory would be great  
 According to his greatness whom she quench'd. (370:213-216)

Modred's sole desire is to usurp the throne; the Red Knight's court is established as the antithesis of Arthur's Round Table.

The idea that both light and dark worlds are dependent



upon a single source of energy is found elsewhere in Tennyson's poetry. The Ancient Sage argues that shadow is only the absence or the negation of light, and that without light there can be no darkness. Lyric XCV of In Memoriam speaks of the Power "which makes the darkness and the light,/ And dwells not in the light alone." Appropriately, all the inhabitants of the dark world are destroyed before Arthur's passing. His final act of kingship is to deal the death blow to Modred, last of the forces of evil which have opposed him.

Tennyson leaves no doubt that the Gleam which Merlin, Arthur and some of the knights pursued lured men before as it will lure them after Arthur's time. It is restricted to neither time nor place, but finds means of manifesting itself in every generation and every realm. The most obvious indication of the universality of the Gleam is Arthur's solace to Bedivere:

God fulfils himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.  
Comfort thyself; what comfort is in me? (449:411-413)

The source of Camelot's success has not been Arthur, but the Gleam. Therefore the fall of Camelot is inconsequential to the nature of the Gleam, although it may be tragic for the city's inhabitants. Arthur's statement is an echo of Merlin's riddle: the city is built to music, therefore never built at all, and therefore built forever.

The Idylls contains several references to manifestations in other times and places of the Gleam which motivates Arthur and Merlin. The Gleam is seen by the tiny druidic group which





Bors stumbles across while in pursuit of the Grail; it showed itself to Bleys, Merlin's teacher; to the Kingdom of the East which Merlin tells Vivien of; to the group of Merlin's youthful comrades who pursue a hart with golden horns; and to the line of kings from which Arthur descends. It will be known in the coming realm for which Arthur awaits in Avilion and Merlin awaits, locked in the oak; and in the kingdom which pleads to Sir Percivale: "Wed thou our Lady, and rule over us,/ And thou shalt be as Arthur in our land" (409:604-605). In each of these microcosms is a situation similar to that in Camelot: a source of energy manifests itself, has a powerful attraction for a few, but repels a majority. None of these kingdoms is at odds with Arthur's kingdom. In fact all support Arthur's claims. Merlin points out to Vivien that her challenge of the Round Table is similar to the threat against the hart with golden horns and similar to abortive attempts at inhibiting the power of the Maiden of the Eastern Isles. The druids whom Sir Bors encounters rise up against him when they learn he has frustrated the purpose of Arthur by pursuing the Grail. Gareth warns Bellicent that to prevent him from joining the Round Table is to deny him the egg which "an eagle, a royal eagle, laid/ Almost beyond eye-reach." This egg is "all of that true steel/ Whereof they forged the brand Excalibur" (312:44-45). Because he has given his allegiance to the Grail Vision Percivale is prevented from becoming the chief figure in a kingdom which will be a replica of Arthur's, which served "as model for the



mighty world" (440:462). The similarity between these kingdoms indicates that Arthur was motivated by an ideal which is ever present to the mind and nature of man. Once again "Akbar's Dream" comes to mind. Akbar lives under a conviction that all religions are an expression of man's instinct for Truth. This is the motive of the Soul, warred against by the Sense.

Although within the Idylls there are indications that the Gleam is not limited to formal religion, let alone to Christianity, Arthur's vision is clearly Christian. The predominant role of the Lady of the Lake, the symbols which she holds as she stands in the doorway to Camelot, the setting round about Arthur during his wedding and during the founding of the Round Table are only a few of many evidences that his vision is primarily Christian. One of the most intriguing of the symbols of his kingship is that of the dragon. Both Arthur and Merlin are descendants, if not in blood quite certainly in spirit and power, of great kingdoms of the past. Both sit in chairs which consist of elaborately intertwined dragon-coils. The difference in the chairs is that Merlin constructs his own, "the seige perilous." The link between Arthur's rule and that of his forebears is symbolized by the intertwining of the dragon-coils, new and old, in his chair:

To his crown the golden dragon clung,  
And down his robe the dragon writhed in gold,  
And from the carven-work behind him crept  
Two dragons gilded, sloping down to make  
Arms for his chair, while all the rest of them  
Thro' knots and loops and folds innumerable  
Fled ever thro' the woodwork, till they found  
The new design wherein they lost themselves.  
(386:432-439)



As the new design engulfs the old, so the kingdom of Arthur, created with the aid of Merlin, engulfs the druidic cult of the past. The druids whom Sir Bors meets confirm their approval of Arthur's rule; Merlin himself comes from a druidic line; Vivien's prediction that

This fire of heaven,  
This old sun-worship, boy, will rise again,  
And beat the Cross to earth, and break the King  
And all his Table (364:450-453)

proves to be an error, a misunderstanding of the druidic cult. (This point depends upon the assumption that Vivien refers to the cult of druidism in her phrase "this old sun-worship." That she chooses to lock Merlin within an oak, sacred to the druids, lends further support to the assumption).

There is a resemblance between the carvings on Arthur's chair and the "dragon-boughts and elvish emblemings" which seethe, twine and curl over the gateway of Camelot. As on Arthur's chair the old is lost in the new, so over the gateway are "new things and old co-twisted, as if Time/ Were nothing" (315:222-223). Tennyson quite probably was aware that the dragon is a common symbol of Christ. In any case the symbols of sword, fish, censer, water and cross which the Lady of the Lake holds over the gateway of the city are clearly Christian. In other poems he more obviously uses the dragon as a symbol of Christ. For example, in "Tiresias" the dragon which Cadmus has slain is spoken of as "the God's own son;" from its cave flows Dirce, the sacred river; the dragon was slain on an "altar-fashioned" rock; to atone for the slaying of the dragon the







heir of Cadmus must sacrifice himself willingly to the great God. If the dragon which symbolizes the kingship of Arthur were taken as a Christian symbol, it would indicate that Arthur represents the possibilities within Christianity for the growth of man out of the beast and toward the divine, and that Arthur's faith is an extension of ancient faiths.

Another indication that Tennyson considers the source of the energy which fills Arthur and his faithful followers to be specifically religious is found in Gareth's answer to Bellicent when she urges him to stay at home and spend his time hunting rather than follow a leader who is not proven king. (Ironically, she earlier played a major role in convincing Leodogran that Arthur was rightful ruler). Gareth replies in surprise: "Follow the deer? follow the Christ, the King,/ . . . . / Else, wherefore born?" (313:116,118). When he does go to Camelot he achieves strength and courtesy which exceed that of Lancelot himself. In contrast, Sir Tristram falls from his position as one of the mightiest of the court to the condition in which Queen Isolt cannot believe the extent of his unfaithfulness and discourtesy. She rebukes him with: "Thou, thro' ever harrying thy wild beasts/ . . . art grown wild beast thyself" (431:630,632).

Any explanation of the Gleam which motivates Arthur and his knights must deal with the theme of love in the Idylls, for Camelot is very much a Court of Love. Two distinct kinds of love operate side by side: human and divine, love for a lady and love for God. Yet curiously, the knights express their love



for God in their devotion to Arthur. They sing: "The King will follow Christ, and we the King" (310:499). The relationship between the "woman-worship" of the Round Table and their worship of God provides insight into the riddle of Camelot.

In making use of the traditional link between the man-God love relationship and the man-woman love relationship Tennyson is saying that the "Confusion, and illusion, and relation,/ Elusion, and occasion, and evasion" of the spiritual city of Camelot built by "a fairy king/ And fairy queens " can best be understood by exploring the nature of human love. The mystery of the fairy king and fairy queens, of the Gleam and those kingdoms which follow it, is similar to the mystery of human romance, just as in the New Testament the mysterious relationship between Christ and the Church is said to be like the relationship between bridegroom and bride. According to this rationale the Song of Solomon is included in the Old Testament canon. As W. G. Dodd points out, Chaucer uses the same technique in Troilus and Cressida, taking great pains to draw explicit parallels between the emotions of the courtly lover, Troilus, and the emotions of man in his pursuit of God.<sup>32</sup>

A major objection to such a reading of the poem is that Tennyson did explicitly state that he was uneasy with explanations which treat the poem as an allegory.<sup>33</sup> This objection may be met by pointing out that to limit the Idylls to an allegorical interpretation is to impose severe restrictions upon it.



Tennyson did say when pressed that

there is an allegorical or perhaps rather a parabolic drift in the poem . . . . Of course Camelot, for instance, . . . is everywhere symbolic of . . . the spiritual development of man.<sup>34</sup>

At another time he said:

My meaning in the Idylls of the King was spiritual . . . . I intended Arthur to represent the Ideal Soul of Man coming into contact with the warring elements of the flesh.<sup>35</sup>

Although the poem cannot be limited to allegorical interpretation, allegory is there. In his copy of R. W. Church's Dante and Other Essays he marked the following comment on the limitation of allegory:

Yet the Commedia is not a pure allegory; it admits and makes use of the allegorical, but the laws of allegory are too narrow for it; the real in it is too impatient of the veil, and breaks through in all its hardness and detail, into what is most shadowy.<sup>36</sup>

Tennyson probably found the inspiration for his allegory in his sources. C.S. Lewis has made a strong case for the existence of an analogy between earthly and heavenly courts in the work of Chretien de Troyes, one of the prime sources for Idylls of the King. He points out that Chretien was primarily concerned with a study of the human heart rather than with narrative for the sake of diversion:

Chretien combined two methods in his work because he combined two different appeals. He wished to satisfy the taste for marvellous adventure, and he did so by writing thousands of couplets (little mentioned in histories of literature) about honest knightly deeds and enchantments no different in essence from the work of any other metrical romancer. But he also wished to satisfy the taste for refined emotionalism, and he did this by interrupting his objective story from time to time with those long passages of soliloquy or analysis in which . . . he is always slipping into allegory.<sup>37</sup>

Because Chretien wrote in an objective age, the "psychological"







passages of his work had to find expression in a technique which stresses action, or linear narrative sequence. Therefore he invariably uses allegory:

It is as if the insensible could not yet knock at the doors of the poetic consciousness without transforming itself into the likeness of the sensible: as if men could not easily grasp the reality of moods and emotions without turning them into shadowy persons. Allegory, besides being many other things, is the subjectivism of an objective age.<sup>38</sup>

To the extent that Lewis' definition of allegory holds true, and that any generalization of the Victorian age may be valid, the same explanation could hold for Tennyson. The age of the Blue Book, of St. Simonism and of The Great Exhibition was quite certainly an objective age. When Tennyson said that "King Arthur was to stand in a symbolic way for the Soul, and his Knights for the human passions which the Soul was to order and subdue,"<sup>39</sup> he was only taking a leaf out of Chretien's book.

As allegory is useful to translate the language of love into an idiom understood by outlanders, it is also useful to translate the language of religion. Therefore we find in the response of any one knight to his lady a particular aspect of every man: devotion not only to woman but to the ideal (to Truth, or to God, if we use Arthur's terms). The pure Sir Galahad, the meek Sir Percival, the fine Sir Gawain, the courteous Sir Lancelot, the honest Sir Bors, are various members of that Round Table which Tennyson defined as "the passions and capacities of a man." For instance, any reader who follows with care the career of Gawain, the "light-of-love" who treats love so lightly



"for women be so light" (418:354), will find himself studying the result of such an attitude toward woman and to Truth upon the human psyche. When Gawain "passes" he appropriately becomes a ghost, finds that all delight is hollow, and is carried away on a wandering wind. Lancelot, whom Sir Kay calls "Sir Fine-face, Sir Fair-hands" and warns that his own fineness may one day undo him, discovers Kay's prediction comes true. After the Lord of Astolat reinforces Kay's judgment with the accusation "too courteous are ye, fair Lancelot" (394:966), we see the effect of his fineness on the life of Elaine, and watch the shock of his discovery that he has never really known the possibilities which woman embodies.

The explanation for the degree of flatness of many characters within the Idylls is that Tennyson did not intend them to be complete, complex human personalities, but each to represent different aspects of the human psyche. For the "whole man" we must look at the whole Round Table. To accuse the Idylls on these grounds is to make the same critical error as is made by those who accuse John Bunyan of drawing one-sided characters in Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Faithful and Giant Despair.

As the courtly lover is driven by passion for his lady, so the knight of the spiritual kingdom is driven by love for God. Arthur recognizes that romantic love and spiritual love have much in common, and tells Guinevere that nothing can raise a knight to a high moral plane as much as passion for a maid. He applies the analogy to himself just before his marriage:



What happiness to reign a lonely king,  
 Vext--O ye stars that shudder over me,  
 O earth that soundest hollow under me,  
 Vext with waste dreams? for saving I be join'd  
 To her that is the fairest under heaven,  
 I seem as nothing in the mighty world,  
 And cannot will my will nor work my work.  
 (305:81-87)

At the end of his life he says that his dominant motive has been the pursuit of God "in the shining of the stars, . . . in the flowering of His fields, . . . in His ways with men" (443:9-11). The link between the two kinds of love is so great that when Arthur loses one he begins to doubt the other. Indeed, so do each of the knights. Tennyson believed the link so powerful that he challenged the validity of any religious vision--such as the vision of Pellam, the holy nun and the Grail questers--which eschewed romantic love. Of course it is not sufficient to love any woman, as Pelleas, Lancelot and Tristram discover. Some women are not worth following, just as some of the knights' visions are "wandering fires" (413:887) which do not lead to truth. Such a woman

like a new disease, unknown to men,  
 Creeps, no precaution used, among the crowd,  
 Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes, and saps  
 The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse  
 With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young.  
 (441:516-519)

How a knight's "sole Queen of Beauty and of Love" may be discovered will be dealt with in the following pages. Arthur makes it quite clear to his followers that love of a maid must always be subject to their love for God, or Truth. Human love is only a means of discovering the nature of Truth, so if a woman is not pure, she is not to be followed. He makes this point quite clear to Guinevere when pointing out the extent of her sin:







I knew  
 Of no more subtle master under heaven  
 Than is the maiden passion for a maid,  
 Not only to keep down the base in man,  
 But teach high thought, and amiable words  
 And courtliness, and the desire of fame,  
 And love of truth, and all that makes a man.  
 And all this throve before I wedded thee,  
 Believing, "Lo, mine helpmate, one to feel  
 My purpose and rejoicing in my joy!"

(440:474-483)

If, like Arthur, a knight finds out too late that his lady is untrue, he must at all cost put her away and suffer the loss of his love rather than betray the truth, or falter in his pursuit of "our fair father Christ" (441:559). The fault of Gawain, Lancelot, Mark, Tristram, Vivien and Ettarre is that their love is prompted by uxoriousness rather than a longing for the ideal. They find no incongruity in a "love-life" flavoured with deceit, unfaithfulness, ease and cowardice.

One of the characteristics of the courtly lover which appears in the knights of the Round Table is humility toward his lady. Once he has found his sole Queen the knight must unflinchingly obey her every whim. Whatever the task which Lynette sets Gareth, however disdainfully she treats him, he submits without a murmur. The measure of the knight's ability to suffer under the seeming capriciousness of his lady is the measure of his devotion to her beauty. He knows that her treatment is a testing of his own fidelity. Under Lynette's painful treatment Gareth responds:

Good sooth! I hold  
 He scarce is knight, yea but half-man, not meet  
 To fight for gentle damsel, he, who lets  
 His heart be stirr'd with any foolish heat  
 At any gentle damsel's waywardness. (329:1146-50)



The explanation of such humility is the certainty of the knight that in spite of all her testing of him she is still "gentle." In allegorical terms, the knight is faithful because he places so much value on the beauty of Truth and God that the goal is worth any amount of suffering. Rebellion to testing would be "foolish heat." His greatest fear is that he is not worthy of the hand of the lady. Sir Pelleas takes endless abuse from Ettarre as long as he remains convinced that she is a "gentle damsel." But from the moment he discovers his error his manner changes. Unfortunately he errs again by assuming that this experience indicates that there is no woman worth loving, that truth cannot be discovered. Without a lady to follow he abandons himself to drunkenness and unbridled sexuality. He does not see that his experience is the inevitable result of pursuing knighthood for the sake of power and "all that belongs to knighthood," and of seeking love as an accretion to his ego. His misdirected humility contrasts with that of Gawain, who takes no woman seriously, and with an oath sets limits to his humility before any woman.

The theme of humility is dominant in In Memoriam. As long as the poet can maintain his faith in "immortal Love," as long as he is controlled by a reverence which prevents him from rebelling when he fails to understand the seeming meaninglessness and tragedy of human experience, he is able to grow toward the light, where "mind and soul make one music." But when he ceases to fear he begins to mock. So he prays for humility: "Help thy vain worlds to bear thy light."



An important addition to the theme of humility appears in "The Holy Grail." Sir Percivale is told by a holy hermit that the reason he cannot enjoy the beauties of the natural world, the embrace of "the lord of all the world," or the responsibilities of family and mission is that he has not "true humility" (407:379f). The hermit goes on to explain that humility is the highest virtue, "mother of them all," and that at the Incarnation she "Followed Him down, and like a flying star/ Led on the gray-hair'd wisdom of the East" (407:452-453). Without this virtue, no man can catch a glimpse of the Gleam. That is why Arthur urged it upon the knighthood.

A second characteristic of courtly love was adultery. It was not considered possible for a knight to love his wife, and a knight never married his lady, although he could very well love a lady who was married to someone else. Yet strangely enough, hand in hand with this characteristic went the requirement that a knight be faithful to his lady. The love relationship could not be casual, and was not to be licentious.<sup>40</sup> How can the contradiction be explained? One theory advanced by scholars of medieval romance begins with the statement that the major purpose of the courtly love poets was to exalt woman in a society which generally looked upon her as inferior to man, as a pawn for the improvement of her lord's political or financial position and as an object of lust.<sup>41</sup> The church did not help the matter by treating all sex as sin, even within marriage. Husbands were urged to avoid intercourse before taking Sunday mass. Ideally, the church argued, a man should avoid sex altogether. If his desires are too great for him, he had better marry than burn, better







have a wife than waste his energy on the female population at large. The courtly love poets reacted by asserting that the object of a noble knight's desire could not be his wife, although it could very well be someone else's. As Lewis argues,

the love which is to be the source of all that is beautiful in life and manners must be the reward freely given by the lady, and only our superiors can reward. But a wife is not a superior . . . . As the wife of a great lord, she may be queen of beauty and of love--but as your own wife, for whom you have bargained with her father, she sinks at once from lady into mere woman . . . . Where marriage does not depend upon the free will of the married, any theory which takes love for a noble form of experience must be a theory of adultery.<sup>42</sup>

Malory seems to recognize a distinction between the social form in which love was manifested in the sixteenth century, and that in the thirteenth. Although he finds the adulterous nature of courtly love repugnant, he hesitates to condemn Lancelot and Guinevere when he finds them in bed together: "And whether they were abed other at other maner of disportis, me lyste nat thereof make no mencion, for love that tyme was nat as love ys nowadayes."<sup>43</sup> Andreas Capellanus agrees that jealousy could not exist between a man and his wife, and since jealousy is a requisite of love, no love could exist between them.<sup>44</sup>

Within this context the explanation of Tennyson's divergence from the tradition of his sources becomes clear. His condemnation of adultery is not capitulation to the prudery often said to be a characteristic of the nineteenth century. In fact when King Arthur swears his knights to "utter faithfulness in love" he is quite in line with the courtly love tradition. But whereas in the twelfth century marriage was a matter of convenience in which the wife was



a servant, a source of income or a political pawn, in the nineteenth century the marriage vows are understood to be the sign of at least a modicum of love. The courtly love poets have achieved a measure of success in their attempt to exalt woman. Whereas in early times the question of faithfulness was not applicable inasmuch as no love existed to begin with, now adultery is a breaking of faith and a blow at love. Then a cuckolded husband was an object of humour because of his wounded pride of possession. Now a cuckolded husband is an object of pity, for he has lost his heart's desire. Then, outside marriage a woman was more likely to be worshipped. Now, outside marriage a woman is more likely to become a pawn. Therefore to retain the code of adultery would be to draw a red herring across the issue.

When Tristram leaves Isolt of Brittany for Queen Isolt he is plagued by dreams of the two women striving over his love. Mark's bride (Queen Isolt) accuses him of having "grown wild beast" and losing his courtesy and manliness through his unfaithfulness. She laments that both of them live in deceit, misery and degradation. Lancelot's affair almost destroys Guinevere. Later, shocked at the beauty of Elaine, he will not allow her even to follow him because he cannot marry her. Vivien and Ettarre candidly admit that their brand of freedom in love is debasing. Guinevere realizes with a start that she has ruined her own life, quite apart from any other harm she has done. By adapting the theme of adultery which was prevalent in his sources to the conditions of the nineteenth century Tennyson was retaining rather than abandoning the chief purpose of those sources.



The vow of faithfulness is significant for the allegorical interpretation of the Idylls. It is linked with the necessarily subjective nature of the vision of the Gleam for each of the knights of the Round Table. Each knight has one lady and one only, each has "his sole Queen of Beauty and of love" (425:208). Even Ettarre realizes, too late, that for her Pelleas was "the one true knight on earth/ And only lover" (420:484-485). Now that he is gone she, like Elaine, wastes, pines and dies, desiring her love in vain. The knight matures and develops a keener understanding of truth as he follows his lady. His courteousness is the product of his devotion, "for manners are not idle, but the fruit/ Of loyal nature and of noble mind" (438:333-334). Those knights who, like Gawain and Tristram, flit from lady to lady, with no real commitment to any, or who, like Lancelot, Merlin and Pelleas, commit themselves to the wrong lady, are destroyed. Each must love one particular maid and that one only, for just as each life is unique, so truth is known uniquely in that life. To abandon his lady for a whore is to compromise his integrity.

Lancelot, like Pelleas, has submitted himself to the wrong lady. He realizes his error when he sees Elaine,

The maiden standing in the dewy light.  
 He had not dream'd she was so beautiful.  
 Then came on him a sort of sacred fear.  
 . . . . .  
 And peradventure had he seen her first  
 She might have made this and that other world  
 Another world for the sick man; but now  
 The shackles of an old love straighten'd him,  
 His honor rooted in dishonor stood,  
 And faith unfaithful kept him falsely true.

(385:350-352; 393:867-872)







Lancelot's sole Queen of Beauty and of love was Elaine, not Guinevere. As he says to Arthur in front of Guinevere, then again to himself in quiet, Elaine's love was "beyond all love/ In women, whomsoever I have known" (398:1284-1285). It were better, he concludes, that he die rather than continue in his will to love Guinevere.

Merlin recognizes the danger of whoredom when he hears Vivien's song:

In love, if love be love, if love be ours,  
Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers:  
Unfaith in aught is want of faith in all.  
(372:385-388)

The key to the song is the phrase "if love be ours." Vivien rightly recognizes the totality of the commitment in love. Merlin knows that to submit in the least is to submit in all, and therefore fears that she will work the charm on him if he responds, for he knows her nature. When he does submit, sitting in "the seige perilous,--perilous for good or ill," he loses himself without realizing the other half of the paradox--salvation. He has not submitted to "the highest and the best," has not submitted in self-sacrifice, so joins Gawain, Tristram, Pelleas and Lancelot in the ranks of the fallen.

Arthur's Order is the temporal manifestation of spiritual truths. It is not enough for the inhabitants of the city to have crossed the threshold of Camelot and allied themselves with the King. The city is filled with people who are scarcely aware of the implications of their citizenship. In fact this is one of the chief causes of the downfall of the city. Unless each knight has a



highly subjective understanding of the ideal which motivates Arthur, he will ultimately fail. This is not to say that the vision is purely subjective and wholly relative. The paradox is written on Excalibur itself, in the two languages inscribed on either side of the blade. "In the oldest tongue of all this world" is graven "Take me," whereas "in the speech ye speak yourself" appears "cast me away." Every newcomer is met with the same challenge, but no one can take the sword from the hand of another, no one man's understanding of the ideal is sufficient for any other man. The sword which must be taken is the means whereby the individual may know and work the will of God, may see the vision. The jewel on the hilt is "elfin Urim," the same jewel which was worn on the breast-plate of Jewish high-priests, and which signified: "the will of God is hereby known." All must find the will of God, but each must find it in his own language.

Later in the poem two knights are found without the sword of faith: Geraint and Pelleas. Both are sworn to Arthur's vows, but neither is a successful knight, for neither has a true and private commitment to the ideal. Geraint is introduced when he gallops up to Guinevere, who has risen late and retired into the forest to watch Arthur and his men hunt "a hart taller than his fellows, milky-white,/ First seen that day." Geraint is "wearing neither hunting-dress/ Nor weapon save a golden-hilted brand," and announces to the Queen "I but come like you to see the hunt,/ Not join it " (334:150-151; 165-166; 179-180). The fact that the "brand" is golden-hilted brings to the reader's mind Gareth's story to Bellicent, persuading her to let him join the court.



Gareth then distinguished between gold and steel, saying that half the world is interested in mere gold, whereas he wants to go to court to claim a prize of "that true steel/ Whereof they forged Excalibur." Geraint is distracted by other baubles. He wears a "summer suit and silks of holiday," and "a purple scarf, at either end whereof/ There swung an apple of the purest gold" (335:172; 167-168).

These applies bring to mind the Hesperidean apples which, in the possession of those who are light of heart and soul, are a means of destruction rather than succour, just as Merlin's charm in the hands of Vivien is a potent danger. The apple motif is suggested again by Merlin when he compares Vivien to Eve. Geraint even sets off on a quest for Guinevere, unarmed, saying:

For tho' I ride unarm'd, I do not doubt  
To find, at some place I shall come at, arms  
On loan, or else for pledge; and, being found,  
Then will I fight him, and will break his pride.  
(335:218-221)

When he finds his enemy, of course, he can find no weapons. At last he is given some by an old and faithful knight, who apologizes that they are "arms, indeed, but old/ And rusty, old and rusty" (339:477-478). These almost cost Geraint his life. Three times his spears break. Geraint's inability to understand the real nature of the cause he has joined is the explanation of his mistreatment of Enid. He, like the old Eastern King of whom Merlin tells, distrusts his lady and hopes to keep her all his own by locking her up, shutting her away from the evils of the world. His chief joy is in the accoutrements of court life, rather than in deeds of noble note and and quests for the strengthening of Arthur's kingdom.







Pelleas is in a similar situation. But whereas Geraint at last achieves an adequate perspective because of the kind of woman he loves, Pelleas fails because he loves an evil woman, one who is herself opposed to Arthur's Order. Unlike Gareth, Pelleas has come to the court for self-aggrandizement, saying to Arthur: "Make me thy knight, because I know, Sir King,/ All that belongs to knighthood, and I love" (413:7-8). He has set out for Camelot in order to find a maid to love:

And since he loved all maidens, but no maid  
 In special, half-awake he whisper'd: "Where  
 O, where? I love thee, tho' I know thee not."  
(414:40-42)

The only others who dare to call Arthur "Sir King" are the proud Sir Percivale and Galahad, the "bright boy-knight" who has accepted the vows of the nun at the expense of his vows to Arthur, and who has "believed in her belief." Tennyson draws attention to this failure of Pelleas to come to grips with the central issue of his knighthood--devotion to "the Christ, the King"--by recording his wail when asked by Guinevere the reason for his disillusionment: "I have no sword" (422:590).

King Leodogran's dream also emphasizes the importance of the subjective element in the knight's apprehension of Arthur's vision. Although Leodogran has been given more than adequate assurance of the validity of Arthur's kingship--in fact more reassurance than other knights are given when they commit themselves to Arthur's service--he is unable to decide whether or not to give the hand of Guinevere to Arthur. As he muses and doubts he sleeps and dreams. His dream is of a landscape rolling in mist, on which a battle rages



and over which voices are heard crying "no king of ours." Suddenly "the solid earth became/ As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven,/ Crown'd" (310:441-443). At this point the long rambling passage explaining Leodogran's indecision abruptly closes: "And Leodogran awoke, and sent/ Ulfius, and Brastias, and Bedivere,/ Back to the court of Arthur answering yea" (310:443-445). Second-hand evidence was of little value until he saw "with his own eyes" the truth of the matter.

Gareth makes the same point to Lancelot when he is offered advice on "all the devisings of their chivalry" in order to help him overcome the fourth and most horrible knight, Death. Gareth answers: "here be rules. I know but one--/ To dash against mine enemy and to win" (331:1319-1320). He must use his own skill in his own manner to fight and win the particular battles which he faces. As Excalibur is sufficient for Arthur alone, so Lancelot's "skill and fineness" is sufficient for Lancelot alone. Tristram puts his finger on the problem when he says to Dagonet that the reason he, Tristram, makes "broken music" with Queen Isolt, Mark's wife, is that he is a second-generation knight: "Fool, I came late, the heathen wars were o'er,/ The life had flown, we sware but by the shell" (426:269-270). He has had no vision such as that of Leodogran, and therefore challenges Arthur's right to kingdom.

The motif of gossip which runs through the poem adds another dimension to the subjectivity of the vision which motivates true knights. Gossip is a threat to the city of Camelot. Vivien begins her assault by rumouring the affair between Guinevere and Lancelot. She is motivated partly by the sting of her own reputation



as a whore, which grew out of her attempt on Arthur's virtue. Balin is destroyed by the slander of Vivien; Pelleas is brought to his knees by Percivale's scandal-mongering; and Garlon is set upon his perverse way after being "driven by evil tongues/ From all his fellows" (359:122-123). Arthur senses the danger of gossip and incorporates a vow by which the knights promise "to speak no slander, nor to listen to it" (440:469).

Ironically, the rumours which are most harmful in the court are all true. Lancelot and Guinevere do have an affair. It is the truth which destroys Balin and Pelleas. What then is wrong with listening to rumour? Perhaps if Arthur had listened to the rumours set afoot by Vivien, perhaps if Elaine had believed the tales told her about Lancelot, Camelot would have lasted longer and Arthur and Elaine would have suffered less.

Whether or not rumour is true matters little, for the assumption of those who heed scandal is false. That assumption is that perfection is attainable among men, and that any failure from perfection is sufficient to damn an individual. Moreover, to let rumour be a determining factor in taking a course of action or setting an attitude is to assume that the hearer has sufficient facts at hand to judge, and that he has sufficient integrity and impartiality to judge. Lancelot laments:

Nay, the world, the world,  
All eye and ear, with such a stupid heart  
To interpret ear and eye, and such a tongue  
To blare its own interpretation. (394:935-938)

Vivien is quite right when she says to Mark that Arthur and his







knights cannot be pure, for "There is no being pure,/ My cherub; saith not Holy Writ the same?" (367:51-52). She is wrong in therefore condemning the whole court. She has not sufficient heart to interpret correctly, nor to see that if perfection is impossible there is another alternative to unlicensed evil. Balin errs in the same way as Vivien, for he fears that he cannot keep the vows, believing that if one vow is broken all is lost. Merlin knows and tells Gareth that although the vows never can be kept, not to take them is to "remain outside with the beast of the field," degenerating into animal, pagan and worse. To listen to slander is to adhere to a solely objective criterion of truth, to deny its subjective aspect, under which man labours because of his finite nature.

Merlin's caution about fame is based upon the same understanding of the subjective nature of truth as is Arthur's vow never to speak or listen to slander. When a young knight blazons "FAME" on his shield Merlin says: "Rather use than fame" (373:478). He knows that when fame is an end in itself the vision of truth is lost. When the comrade of Merlin's youth burst out into a song filled with the fire of fame the hart with the golden horns which they had pursued was lost. As Guinevere recognizes at the last, "Fame is of the world," rather than of the spirit.

Yet if there is a subjective element in truth, how is any man to know whether a particular act is evil or good, how is he to know what course of action to take? First, no man can be quite sure of the validity of another's actions, for no one man ever knows for certain the motives of another man's heart. Therefore Arthur is always hesitant to deny any knight a quest. He



senses that Geraint's wish to leave Camelot on a quest to his own country is a bad one, and that the Grail quest is also poorly motivated. Yet he does not deny Geraint's request nor order the knights to abandon the Grail quest. All he knows is that they seem to contradict his own understanding of good. Second, the only time when a knight knows of the rightness of his own course of action is when he, like Arthur, has "a secretword," some inner conviction. Arthur's secret word is not that of any other. Merlin's knowledge of the secret in his little book is potent for evil when in the hands of any one else. Every man must have a unique vision of truth, for every human is unique. For this reason Arthur has his knights swear "To reverence the King, as if he were/ Their conscience, and their conscience as their King, . . . To honor his own word as if his God's" (440:465-466, 470). Their own understanding of truth is sacred; their own word, when based upon their understanding, must be held sacred.

Yet truth is also objective. No person in the Idylls can oppose truth for long and survive, although some try. Lynette believes that her understanding of truth is sufficient. She comes to Arthur requesting not only that a boon be granted, but that he send Lancelot to carry out the quest. She has too rigid an idea or pre-conception of the way in which the ideal is achieved. When Gareth is granted the quest instead of Lancelot, she is indignant and responds by rebuking Arthur and slighting the whole Round Table. Her rigidity causes much grief to herself, but eventually she takes the incongruous step of preferring Gareth to Lancelot as her defender. She has unwittingly fallen in love with her "highest and best" knight.



Pellam also attempts to codify religion, to protect his own understanding of truth from the flux of reality. He collects relics, distinguishing between the divine and the profane. Lest he be polluted he prohibits all women from entering his castle, refusing to give himself in humility to any lady. His accusation against Balin when Balin uses the sacred lance to save his own life is: "He defileth heavenly things with earthly uses!" (363:415). In putting so much stress upon things Pellam makes the error which Sir Bedivere is prevented from making. Not even Excalibur is valuable when separated from the hand of Arthur. No single understanding of truth, no single vision is permanently valid. For a major characteristic of Arthur's world is growth.

Arthur tries to point out to his knights that the Grail quest is false because it abstracts each from his own responsibilities, from his own understanding of truth, by establishing an ideal which, to be met, requires the denial of every other moral relationship. The quest is an exercise in absurdity from the beginning. The holy nun who inaugurates the quest declares that the value of the vision is its capacity to cleanse the world and all who see the Grail. Yet only knights who are already pure are allowed a glimpse of the Grail. Arthur implicitly condemns the quest when he asks his knights as they set off: "What go ye into the wilderness to see?" (404:287). This is the question asked by Christ of the religious generation which went into the wilderness to see the miracles of John the Baptist, seeking signs without having discernment, without being willing to implement religious truth in daily life.







It is true that Arthur seems to exempt Galahad from the general condemnation when he says: "For such/ As thou art is the vision, not for these" (405:294-295). Yet later Arthur says to his knights: "If indeed there came a sign from heaven,/ Blessed are Bors, Lancelot, and Percivale" (412:869-870). When Arthur wonders why his knights pursue the Grail in spite of the fact that they have not seen it, Galahad replies "in a voice/ Shrilling along the hall" that he has seen it. The shrill tone is reminiscent of the discord of the songs of Tristram and Vivien. Moreover, all others who say they have the Grail have been visited with misery and sterility. Bors weeps and will not even speak of the incident. Arthur has been known to err in his judgment of the knights before now: Merlin laments to Vivien that the King is so ready to believe good of all his knights that he will not open his eyes to their error. His inability to see the sin of Guinevere and Lancelot has caused him much loss. We remember that Galahad was reputedly the bastard of Lancelot, begotten by enchantment. Furthermore, the Last Tournament, which was the death throes of Camelot, was in honour of Nestling, the "maiden babe" which Lancelot found when he scaled the "eagle's nest." The child had a ruby necklace on, was reared by Guinevere, then died. The tournament which followed was called the Tournament of the Dead Innocence.

If Tennyson does disapprove of Galahad's pursuit of the Grail, he is at least being consistent in his impatience with asceticism. Several of the early dramatic monologues show the same impatience: "Saint Simeon Stylites," "Saint Agnes' Eve," and "Sir Galahad." He certainly reversed the impact of the Arthurian story of King



Pellam from that of his sources for the tale of "Balin and Balan." Bogdanow explains that in the Roman du Graal the tale of the "Queste" is an explanation of how "the Grail adventures themselves [are] divine punishment for Balain's unwitting transgression in wounding Pellean and touching the Holy Lance."<sup>45</sup> Tennyson approves of Balin's actions, and ridicules Pellam's superstition. Moreover, we know that one of the reasons he hesitated to write of the Grail was:

I doubt whether such a subject could be handled in these days without incurring a charge of irreverence. It would be too much like playing with sacred things. The old writers believed in the Sangreal.<sup>46</sup>

Locke offers us a way out of the predicament when he remarks that the question of whether the Grail stories are orthodox or heretical from the Christian point of view is an old one, and that by taking sides we are overlooking the poetic function of the Grail narrative: to imply, to suggest. He says that the very ambiguity of the Grail is precisely its strong point, and that the romance poets were simply presenting us with a common human predicament.<sup>47</sup> If we wish to go further than this, we can only be certain that Tennyson believes that for the large proportion of the Round Table, the quest is an error. Unlike every other manifestation of the Gleam, it brings no positive effects to human civilization.

The Gleam, or the vision of Truth is easily distinguished from its counterfeits. In all its manifestations we see the same characteristics, whether it appear as a lady to her knight, as a



maiden of the isles to an Eastern King, or as a hart with golden horns to Merlin and his comrades. First, it promises and provides endless growth, humanizing the individual and amazing all who see its brilliance. It motivates deeds of noble note, expressed in concretions rather than abstractions. For the beholder and him alone it provides direction and purpose and conviction: Arthur is "he who knows," each knight knows his lady to be "sole Queen of Beauty and of Love." It works harmony in the lives of its beholders, unifying and bringing joy and laughter. It is universal, although expressed in different ways to each beholder. No one who comes to Camelot is refused. Finally, it has its dwelling deep within the subconscious mind of man. Every dream which appears to the men of Camelot reinforces the ideals of Arthur, whether or not the dreamer is at the moment moving to the music of Camelot. Leodogran is shown the validity of Arthur's kingship; Percival, the folly of his pursuit of the Grail; Tristram, the agony of his two "queens" because of his lack of faith; and Arthur, just before the last battle when his mind is covered with fog, the true state of affairs regarding his life in contrast with the life of Gawain.

If for a moment we draw back from the Idylls and listen to Northrop Frye's explanation of the function of myth in poetry, and of the role of the hero, we will be better able to understand what Tennyson meant when he said that Arthur was the ideal man pursuing the ideal. After stating that the central myth of literature in its narrative aspect is the quest myth, Frye says:







Art deals not with the real but with the conceivable.. . . Art, which Plato called a dream for awakened minds, seems to have as its final cause . . . the realizing of a world in which the inner desire and the outward circumstance coincide . . . . The central myth of art must be the vision of the end of social effort, the innocent world of fulfilled desires, the free human society . . . .

The importance of the god or hero in the myth lies in the fact that such characters, who are conceived in human likeness and yet have more power over nature, gradually build up the vision of an omnipotent personal community beyond an indifferent nature. It is this world which the hero regularly enters in his apotheosis. The world of this apotheosis thus begins to pull away from the rotary cycle of the quest, in which all triumph is temporary . . . . We may call it the comic vision in contrast to the tragic vision, which sees the quest only in the form of its ordained cycle.<sup>48</sup>

This very long quotation is inserted because it concisely links the major ideas in each of the three preceding chapters with the expression of the ideal in the Idylls. Tennyson's struggle with epistemology left him convinced that human experience encompasses much more than the "real," which is limited to time and space. His own art was primarily concerned with the super-real, the conceivable. Arthur encounters the real as only a limited aspect of his movement "from the great deep to the great deep." Pursuing a nebulous vision, an inner desire, Arthur encounters evil as the negation not so much of his own life as of his vision of the ideal, his "inner desire." The false visions in the Idylls are false not because they oppose Arthur but because they deny "the free human society." His triumph over the forces of evil is triumph only in terms of the noumenal world. For although Tennyson hoped that history would produce growth in man, he did not expect to realize his hope. His vision was comic only beyond history.



## SUMMARY

The elements of Tennyson's thought explained in the first three chapters of this thesis--his theory of knowledge, his idea of evil and his view of history--are most completely expressed in Idylls of the King. Critics have been unable to relate two technical aspects of the poem to the theme, "Sense at war with Soul." These two problems are the mythic subject matter and the discontinuous narrative method. Tennyson knew that readers would be unhappy with subject matter taken from another age, but chose Arthurian myth because he felt that like all myth it presented compelling events which deal with archetypal situations in human experience; that it would take his readers' eyes off petty local concerns, and yet that it would attract them in a moment of national self-consciousness just because of its connection with the birth of the nation. In choosing a discontinuous narrative method he was using the technique of his sources. The poets of medieval romance used the structural principles of polycentricity and interlacing in order to achieve unity, comprehensiveness, a motivation which is structural rather than psychological, and an emphasis upon theme rather than event as a source of suspense. The poet's private statements, together with evidence gathered from manuscripts showing successive stages in the composition of the Idylls, verify that he consciously chose the structural techniques of his sources rather than the unilinear narrative sequences of post-sixteenth century writers. The theme of the Idylls may be clarified by studying the curious attraction of the Gleam which Tennyson described in a



late autobiographical poem, "Merlin and the Gleam." The poet's fascination with the Gleam is much like that of the knights of the Round Table with Arthur, with their ladies, and with "the Christ." To Arthur the Gleam appears as a specifically Christian vision of Truth, but a vision with which five or six kingdoms of other climes and eras mentioned in the Idylls have deep sympathy. All the characters in the poem are motivated by the vision, but whereas some are attracted, some are repelled. Those who are attracted find that they increase in physical, mental and spiritual capacity; those who are repelled shrivel and shrink until they become worse than beasts and worse than pagans. Tennyson uses a traditional device, the allegory of love found in Chretien de Troyes, in Chaucer's Troilus and Cressida, and in Malory. By means of this allegory he shows that man's pursuit of Truth is similar to his love for woman, when that love is ideally expressed. The love is characterized by humility, by utter faithfulness, by uniqueness. Each knight has "one sole Queen of Beauty and of love," each lady has "one true lover." He must be willing to sacrifice himself for his lady, to prefer only God to her. So doing, he will "spring like fire from ashes." If, like many of the knights, he errs and chooses a lady who is not worth loving, or if he loves egoistically and uxoriously, he will be destroyed: Soul will lose the war with *Sense*.







## NOTES

## CHAPTER I. EPISTEMOLOGY

<sup>1</sup>Mill, On Bentham and Coleridge, 1, 102.

<sup>2</sup>Beach, The Concept of Nature, 423; Willey, Nineteenth Century Background, 96; Priestley, "Tennyson's Idylls," in Killham, ed., Critical Essays, 254; Buckley, Tennyson, 121; Brashear, The Living Will, 9; Ryals, Theme and Symbol, 25.

<sup>3</sup>Fairchild, Religious Trends, IV, 118; Eliot, "In Memoriam," in Killham, ed., Critical Essays, 212; Baum, Tennyson, 131.

<sup>4</sup>Poetical Works, ed., Rolfe, 195. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will provide page and line, in parenthesis. Where a work is numbered in stanzas rather than lines, the stanza will appear in roman numerals. Poems not in this edition will be taken from the Oxford edition and referred to as "(Oxford:537)."

<sup>5</sup>Joseph Beach, in The Concept of Nature, 423, suggests that Kant had a strong influence upon Tennyson. A.B. Dhruva, in Kant and Tennyson, points out ideas shared by the two. To my knowledge no critics have explored the influence of the Cambridge Platonists upon Tennyson. I will provide evidence that Tennyson knew the works of both extensively. Cassirer, in The Platonic Renaissance, points out the relationship between the English and the German thinkers.

<sup>6</sup>Shannon, Tennyson and the Reviewers, 14, 16, 18, 57.

<sup>7</sup>Nicolson, Tennyson; Baum, Tennyson; Carr, "Tennyson as a Modern Poet," in Killham, ed., Critical Essays, 41-64; Ryals, Theme and Symbol.

<sup>8</sup>Stange, "Tennyson and the Voice of Men," 3.

<sup>9</sup>Korg speaks of "The Pattern of Fatality in Tennyson's Poems," VNL, XIV (1958), 8-11. Nicolson and Carr argue that his morbidity makes him a modern poet. This paper will explore the manifestations of Tennyson's awareness--his vision--rather than its causes.

<sup>10</sup>Sessions, "The Dramatic Monologue," PMLA, LXII (1947), 508; Langbaum, Poetry of Experience, 96. Sessions speaks of the necessity of an interplay between speaker and audience, and of character revelation.



<sup>11</sup>Sir Charles Tennyson lists some of these in Chapter V of his Annotated Bibliography. Among the best is Mattes, "In Memoriam": The Way of a Soul.

<sup>12</sup>Cassirer, Platonic Renaissance, 24, 67-69.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>14</sup>Cudworth, True Intellectual System, 853.

<sup>15</sup>Cassirer, Platonic Renaissance, 63.

<sup>16</sup>John Smith, Select Discourses, 97; quoted in Cassirer, Platonic Renaissance, 58.

<sup>17</sup>Cudworth. A Sermon Before the House of Commons; quoted in Cassirer, Platonic Renaissance. 34.

<sup>18</sup>Whichcote, Aphorisms, 541.

<sup>19</sup>John Smith, Select Discourses, 118f. quoted in Willey, Seventeenth Century Background, 142.

<sup>20</sup>Cudworth, True Intellectual System, 716.

<sup>21</sup>Whichcote, Aphorism, 57, 27; quoted in Cassirer, Platonic Renaissance, 27 and 40, respectively.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 76; quoted in Cassirer, Platonic Renaissance, 41.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 569, as cited in Cassirer, Platonic Renaissance, 36.

<sup>24</sup>More, Treatise of the Soul's Immortality, chapter IX; quoted in Mackinnon, Henry More, 86-87. See also "Of Free Will," Enchiridion Ethicum, 172-181. The major purpose of Cudworth's True Intellectual System is a refutation of atheism.

<sup>25</sup>Cassirer, Platonic Renaissance, 3.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 85. Macintosh, in his article for the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 8th ed., also makes the extension from the Cambridge Movement to Kant.

<sup>27</sup>Much of Dr. Tennyson's library is now in the Lincoln City Library, England. To date no catalogue has been published. However, I have handled these books there.



<sup>28</sup>Motter, Writings of Hallam, 157n.

<sup>29</sup>Marchand, The Atheneum, 11. Further evidence that Tennyson was familiar with the movement is his admiration of Martineau's Types of Ethical Theory (Memoir, II, 381). Martineau uses Cudworth's ethical theories to show the nature and quality of the purely dianoetic ethics. Tennyson records his disagreement as well as his admiration.

<sup>30</sup>Macintosh, "The Progress of Ethical Philosophy," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 8th ed., 359-361.

<sup>31</sup>Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, 163 (Sec. XII, Part III).

<sup>32</sup>Kant, Pure Reason, 32.

<sup>33</sup>Cited in Greene, Moral, Aesthetic and Religious Insight, 18.

<sup>34</sup>Kant, Pure Reason, 79-82.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>36</sup>Kant, Practical Reason, 60.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>39</sup>Kant, Religion, 22-28.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>41</sup>Kant, Practical Reason, 126-130.

<sup>42</sup>Pfleiderer, Development of Theology, 372.

<sup>43</sup>Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, 279, 381.

<sup>44</sup>Willey, More Nineteenth Century Studies, 62.

<sup>45</sup>Mattes, "In Memoriam," 28.

<sup>46</sup>Coleridge, The Friend, 7, 10-11.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.





<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 349.

<sup>49</sup>Coleridge, Aids to Reflection, 145-146.

<sup>50</sup>Coleridge, The Friend, 303-305.

<sup>51</sup>Coleridge, Aids to Reflection, 277.

<sup>52</sup>Memoir, I, 37, 102.

<sup>53</sup>Mill, Utilitarianism, 154-155.

<sup>54</sup>Newman, Apologia, 122.

<sup>55</sup>Huxley, "Agnosticism," Collected Essays, V, 237, 238, 243, 245.

<sup>56</sup>Huxley, "Prolegomena to Evolution and Ethics," Collected Essays, IX, 45.

<sup>57</sup>Hallam records this statement in an unpublished and as yet unlisted notebook, now held by the Lincoln City Library. The note appears in a leather bound diary under the date July, 1885. The substance is confirmed by a note in Eversley, V, 447, in which Hallam records that his father believed the triumph of evil to be temporary.

<sup>58</sup>Arthur repeatedly urges his people to rise out of the beast and towards the divine. This is the significance of the mural on the walls of his hall. See Engelberg, "Beast Image in . . . the Idylls," ELH, XXII (1955), 287-292.

<sup>59</sup>Memoir, II, 69; Eversley, III, 264-265.

<sup>60</sup>Maurice, in a paper "On the Words Natural and Supernatural" read to The Metaphysical Society two years after Tennyson's "Lucretius" was published, draws these same conclusions about Lucretius. Tennyson and Maurice were close friends, had known each other since their Cambridge days, and shared theological convictions.

<sup>61</sup>Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, 486n.

<sup>62</sup>Memoir, I, 41.

<sup>63</sup>Charles Tennyson, "Tennyson's Religion," Six Tennyson Essays, 82.



<sup>64</sup>Motter, Writings of Hallam, 17.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 199.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 200.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 212.

<sup>68</sup>The Princess, V, 181. Killham remarks upon Tennyson's view of the moral contribution which women may make; see Tennyson and "The Princess", 258-259.

<sup>69</sup>Widener Library, Harvard, MS. Eng. 952.2, 47. The manuscript is on Farringford stationery, so was written sometime after "De Profundis,"

<sup>70</sup>Tennyson remarked: "The whole poem is very personal . . . . [It is] what I might have believed about the deeper problems of life 'A thousand summers ere the birth of Christ,'" Eversley, VI, 397.

<sup>71</sup>Milnes, Life & Letters (1874), 290.

<sup>72</sup>Ryals, From the Great Deep, 109.

<sup>73</sup>In Moral, Aesthetic and Religious Insight, 24-26, Greene argues that these tests are used repeatedly by Kant.

<sup>74</sup>Coleridge, The Friend, 303; Kant, Practical Reason, 82, 94.

<sup>75</sup>Eversley, V, 443.

<sup>76</sup>Mark 1:24.

<sup>77</sup>Memoir, II, 297.

<sup>78</sup>Green, Moral, Aesthetic and Religious Insight, 59-60.



## CHAPTER II. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

<sup>1</sup>Cited in Cary, Tennyson: His Homes and Haunts, 79.

<sup>2</sup>Killham, Tennyson and "The Princess", 405.

<sup>3</sup>Motter, Writing of Hallam, 199.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 211.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 200.

<sup>6</sup>Basler remarks on these three in his study "Tennyson's Maud," Sex, Symbolism and Psychology, 75.

<sup>7</sup>See footnote 6 of Chapter I.

<sup>8</sup>Tillotson, "Tennyson's Serial Poem," Mid-Victorian Studies, 109. Ryals, From the Great Deep, 91, 94.

<sup>9</sup>Bentham, Morals and Legislation, 1.

<sup>10</sup>Mill, Utilitarianism, 169.

<sup>11</sup>Quoted in Thomas Woods, Poetry and Philosophy, 183.

<sup>12</sup>"Positivism," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 13th ed.; "Positivism," Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 1967.

<sup>13</sup>Widener Library, Harvard, MS. Eng. 952.1, 47, fol. 66.

<sup>14</sup>Bentham, Morals and Legislation, 3.

<sup>15</sup>Ryals, Theme and Symbol, 125; Buckley, Tennyson, 77.

<sup>16</sup>Memoir, I, 98. Killham, in Tennyson and "The Princess", 25, says that this letter does not indicate his opposition to the sect, only his awareness that it was dealing with vital issues, and perhaps his hesitancy about its religious disposition. However, Killham seems to have misrepresented the tone of the letter.

<sup>17</sup>Memoir, I, 41.





<sup>18</sup>Carr, "Tennyson as a Modern Poet," in Killham, ed., Critical Essays, 64.

<sup>19</sup>Langbaum, Poetry of Experience, 107-108.

<sup>20</sup>Basler, "Tennyson's Maud," Sex, Symbolism and Psychology, 91.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 89-90.

<sup>22</sup>Widener Library, Harvard, MS. Eng. 952.2, 106. Some of these stanzas, written in 1833, were published in 1865 under the title "On a Mourner."

<sup>23</sup>Memoir, I, 168.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., II, 321.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., I, 311; II, 380.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., I, 170.

<sup>27</sup>Hess, "Tennyson: 1809-1959," CR, CXCVI (1959), 183.

<sup>28</sup>Basler, "Tennyson's Maud," Sex, Symbolism and Psychology, 85-86.

<sup>29</sup>Chesterton, The Victorian Age, 111.

<sup>30</sup>Goldwin Smith, "The War Passages in Maud," Saturday Review, I (November 3, 1855), 14-15. Quoted in Jump, ed., Tennyson, 187. See also Baum, Tennyson, 140.

<sup>31</sup>The information is contained in an unpublished letter to Adams from Tennyson, datelined 1 May 1843, Boxley. Yale University Library, The Tinker Library Catalogue, 2046.

<sup>32</sup>Hallam and other Cambridge friends arranged for the first English publication of "Adonais" in 1829, three years before In Memoriam was begun (Motter, Writings of Hallam, 5). Throughout his essays Hallam often refers to Shelley. Tennyson said that Shelley "did yet give the world another heart and new pulses, and so we are kept going" (Memoir, I, 141).

<sup>33</sup>Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry," Works, ed. Ingpen and Peck, VII, 118.



<sup>34</sup>Motter, Writings of Hallam, 204.

<sup>35</sup>Memoir, I, 119.

<sup>36</sup>James Spedding, unsigned review of "Poems [1842]," Edinburgh Review, LXXVII (April, 1843), 373-91. Quoted in Jump, ed., Tennyson, 149.

<sup>37</sup>Beck, "Clouds Upon Camelot," EJ, XLV (1956), 454.

<sup>38</sup>Carlyle, Past and Present, 196-197.

<sup>39</sup>Widener Library, Harvard, MS. Eng. 952.1, 3, fol. 1.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., fol. 6. The note was later incorporated into "Armageddon" as the Angel's praise of God and Christ.

### CHAPTER III. THE IDEA OF HISTORY

<sup>1</sup>Memoir, I, 213.

<sup>2</sup>Tillotson, Mid-Victorian Studies, 109; Ryals, From the Great Deep, 91; Brashear, Tennyson and the Living Will, 82-108, 221.

<sup>3</sup>E.D.H. Johnson in Alien Vision, 15, speaks of his "dream of progress towards an Utopian social order." E.E. Smith in Two Voices, iii, argues that in In Memoriam Tennyson comes close to a synthesis of evolutionary theory and religious faith. See also Ryals, Theme and Symbol, 250-255.

<sup>4</sup>Stange, "Tennyson's Mythology," in Killham, ed., Critical Essays, 137-50, argues that "Demeter and Persephone" is convincing insofar as it remains true to the Greek myth, which treats human experience as a process analogous to the cycle of the year. Tennyson lacks the assurance of the triumph of love and life which Dante and George Herbert have, for example. Therefore his attempt to impose a progressive movement upon the poem is unconvincing, and to us seems a "Victorian" view. To read the poem as an anticipation of the story of Christ is to overlook the "conception of an unchanging earthly life and a continual earthly fruition" (149). See also Ryals, From the Great Deep, 99.

<sup>5</sup>Carr, "Tennyson as a Modern Poet," in Killham, ed., Critical Essays, 63. Carr says that the poet's major theme is frustration, which he flees by means of elaborate strategies of dream and illusion.



<sup>6</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, The Phenomenon of Man, Book III.

<sup>7</sup> Niebuhr, Faith and History, 3, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Tuveson, Millennium and Utopia, 203.

<sup>9</sup> The two most detailed studies are Masterman, Tennyson as a Religious Teacher and Sneath, The Mind of Tennyson, both published in 1900. Weatherhead's The Afterworld of the Poets (1929), chapter II and Stevenson's Darwin Among the Poets (1932), chapter III, contain more recent but much less detailed treatments of the subject.

<sup>10</sup> Sanders, "Carlyle and Tennyson," PMLA, LXXVI (1961), 88.

<sup>11</sup> C.S. Lewis was inspired by reading the fantasies of George Macdonald (1824-1905). Tennyson also admired Macdonald's work, especially the mystical narrative poem "Within and Without." Evidently the appreciation was mutual, for Macdonald once gave an eulogistic lecture on Tennyson's work (according to a letter cited by K. Tillotson, Mid-Victorian Studies, 95 n.2, and edited in The Life of Edward Bulwer, II, 471).

<sup>12</sup> Veracity does not consist in saying, but in the intention of communicating, truth; and the philosopher who cannot utter the whole truth without conveying falsehood, and at the same time, perhaps, exciting the most malignant passions, is constrained to express himself either mythically or equivocally.  
Biographia Literaria I, 100.

<sup>13</sup> Widener Library, Harvard, MS. Eng. 952.1, 69, fol. 161.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, The Metaphysical Society, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Memoir, I, 312.

<sup>16</sup> Widener Library, Harvard, MS. Eng. 952.1, 46, fol. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Green, "Tennyson's Development," PMLA, LXVI (1951), 676. Green cites Eidson, Tennyson in America, 4.

<sup>18</sup> See note 1.

<sup>19</sup> Tillotson, Mid-Victorian Studies, 108-109.

<sup>20</sup> Memoir, I, 226.







<sup>21</sup>The note appears in a small brown diary which is in the Tennyson Research Center, Lincoln. The notebook is not yet catalogued.

<sup>22</sup>Tuveson, Millenium and Utopia, ix.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>24</sup>In an early scheme for his Arthurian poem he considered developing an allegory in which Merlin who was to represent science, marries his daughter to Modred, the sceptical understanding (Eversley, V, 438). Merlin's explanation to Vivien of the force of mind and will necessary to learn the language of his book adds to this interpretation. Charles Tennyson agrees: "Merlin clearly represents the intellect" (Alfred Tennyson, 299).

<sup>25</sup>Beach, Concept of Nature, 423.

<sup>26</sup>Widener Library, Harvard, MS. Eng. 952.1, 16, fol. 26.

<sup>27</sup>Litzinger, "The Structure of 'The Last Tournament,'" VP (1963), 53-60.

<sup>28</sup>Kissane, "The Passion of the Past . . .," ELH, XXXII (1965), 103.

<sup>29</sup>Carr, "Tennyson as a Modern Poet," in Killham, ed., Critical Essays, 60-61.

#### CHAPTER IV. IDYLLS OF THE KING

<sup>1</sup>S.T. Coleridge. Marginalia in the flyleaves of Milton's Poems Upon Several Occasions (London, 1791); quoted by Max F. Schulz in The Poetic Voices of Coleridge, 4.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall McLuhan speaks of Tennyson as a picturesque poet without a comprehensive and elastic technique, and states that the Idylls is a risky expansion of moments of awareness described in terms of objective landscape. See "Tennyson and Picturesque Poetry," in Killham, ed., Critical Essays, 82, 84; Baum, Tennyson, chapter VIII; Smalley, "A New Look," JEGP, LXI (1962), 349-357.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, 318, 321.



<sup>4</sup>Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, 297; Memoir, I, 453; Hopkins said scornfully, "He should have called them Charades from the Middle Ages (dedicated by permission to H.R.H./ etc);" quoted in "G.M. Hopkins on the Idylls," Jump, ed., Tennyson, 334.

<sup>5</sup>Eversley, V, 488.

<sup>6</sup>Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, 265-266.

<sup>7</sup>Weld, "Tennyson," CR, LXXII (November, 1897), 690.

<sup>8</sup>Lewis, An Experiment in Criticism, 41.

<sup>9</sup>Eversley, V, 445.

<sup>10</sup>Lewis, Essays in Criticism, 43.

<sup>11</sup>Rader, in "Maud": The Biographical Genesis, suggests that the poem is "not completely successful as a work of art," and finds "the love story of the poem strained and unreal, the emotion uncomfortably raw and dramatically uncontrolled" (2). He argues that Maud is "outwardly dramatic but really subjective" and therefore poetically deficient (120).

<sup>12</sup>Baum in Tennyson Sixty Years After says that the poet made grief "a convenience to the Muse" (116), and that the elegy contains artificial grief and an imagined sorrow (121).

<sup>13</sup>Eversley, V, 438.

<sup>14</sup>Eversley, V, 442-443.

<sup>15</sup>Memoir, 364. This remark was made with reference to "Demeter and Persephone." However, it also applies to his treatment of Arthurian myth, for when he made the point he was replying to a request to write something on a particular legend. His response was that the facts of the legend alone were of little interest to him.

<sup>16</sup>Eversley, V, 439.

<sup>17</sup>McLuhan treats the poem as a collection of idylls in "Tennyson and the Romantic Epic." Eliot, in "In Memoriam" and Smalley, in "A New Look" treat the poem as a poor attempt at narrative.

<sup>18</sup>Eversley, V, 450.



<sup>19</sup>Form and Meaning in Medieval Romance, 22. Vinaver's explanation of the techniques of medieval romance seem to provide a means of understanding the thorny problem of technique in the Idylls. Much of what follows was inspired by my reading of this remarkable pamphlet. Charles Tennyson arrives at much the same conclusion without making the extension from medieval romance. See "Some MSS. of the 'Idylls of the King' and a Note on Tennyson as a Narrative Poet," Six Tennyson Essays, 153-187.

<sup>20</sup>Memoir, I, 194. Vinaver records Walter Scott's statement in the preface to his edition of Sir Tristram that "what was gained in simplicity was lost in art" Form and Meaning, 6.

<sup>21</sup>Vinaver, Form and Meaning, 9f.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 10-15.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 18-20.

<sup>25</sup>Eversley, V, 489.

<sup>26</sup>The notebooks referred to in the following pages are in the Amy Lowell collection in the Houghton Reading Room of Harvard's Widener Library. Sir Charles Tennyson describes the method of composition in his essay, "MSS. of the Idylls of the King," but does not mention the methods of medieval romance. In conversation he has pointed out to me that his conclusions support my findings.

<sup>27</sup>I must limit this remark to the materials which I have had an opportunity to view, which include those in the Widener Library, the Tennyson Research Center in Lincoln (these being the two largest collections of Tennyson MSS), the British Museum, the Trinity College Library and the Bodleian Library

<sup>28</sup>Frye, "The Archetypes of Literature," Fables of Identity, 17.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>He would say no more to Conde B. Pallen than: "You see further into my meaning than most of my commentators have done" (The Meaning of the Idylls, 5).

<sup>31</sup>Eversley, V, 443.

<sup>32</sup>Courtly Love, 191-203.





<sup>33</sup>Eversley, V, 452.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 442.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 443.

<sup>36</sup>Church, 81. Tennyson's copy is now in the Lincoln City Library.

<sup>37</sup>Allegory of Love, 113-114.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>39</sup>Eversley, V, 490.

<sup>40</sup>Dodd, Courtly Love, 9.

<sup>41</sup>Lewis, Allegory of Love, 13f.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>43</sup>Vinaver, Works of Malory, 1165; quoted in Davies, "The Worshipful Way in Malory," ed. Lawlor, Patterns of Love, 161.

<sup>44</sup>Dodd, Courtly Love, 7.

<sup>45</sup>Romance of the Grail, 203.

<sup>46</sup>Memoir, I, 456-457.

<sup>47</sup>Quest for the Holy Grail, 6-7.

<sup>48</sup>"Archetypes of Literature," Fables of Identity, 18-19.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

<u>AR</u>	<u>Antioch Review</u>
<u>CH</u>	<u>Classical Journal</u>
<u>CE</u>	<u>College English</u>
<u>CR</u>	<u>Contemporary Review</u>
<u>CM</u>	<u>Cornhill Magazine</u>
<u>C</u>	<u>Criticism</u>
<u>DA</u>	<u>Dissertation Abstracts</u>
<u>DUJ</u>	<u>Durham University Journal</u>
<u>EA</u>	<u>The English Association</u>
<u>EJ</u>	<u>English Journal</u>
<u>ELH</u>	<u>English Literary History</u>
<u>ER</u>	<u>English Review</u>
<u>Est</u>	<u>English Studies</u>
<u>Ex</u>	<u>Explicator</u>
<u>HAB</u>	<u>Humanities Association Bulletin</u>
<u>JEGP</u>	<u>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</u>
<u>L</u>	<u>Listener</u>
<u>MLN</u>	<u>Modern Language Notes</u>
<u>MLQ</u>	<u>Modern Language Quarterly</u>
<u>MP</u>	<u>Modern Philology</u>
<u>NC</u>	<u>Nineteenth Century</u>
<u>N&amp;Q</u>	<u>Notes and Queries</u>
<u>P</u>	<u>Personalist</u>
<u>PQ</u>	<u>Philological Quarterly</u>
<u>PMLA</u>	<u>Publications of the Modern Language Association</u>
<u>RES</u>	<u>Review of English Studies</u>
<u>SR</u>	<u>Saturday Review</u>
<u>SEL</u>	<u>Studies in English Literature</u>
<u>SP</u>	<u>Studies in Philology</u>
<u>TSL</u>	<u>Tennessee Studies in Literature</u>
<u>TR</u>	<u>Texas Review</u>
<u>TSLL</u>	<u>Texas Studies in Language and Literature</u>
<u>TQ</u>	<u>University of Toronto Quarterly</u>
<u>TSE</u>	<u>Tulane Studies in English</u>
<u>TC</u>	<u>Twentieth Century</u>
<u>VNL</u>	<u>Victorian Newsletter</u>
<u>VP</u>	<u>Victorian Poetry</u>
<u>VS</u>	<u>Victorian Studies</u>
<u>VQP</u>	<u>Virginia Quarterly Review</u>



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